

No 266.

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FAME AND FORTUNE

STORIES
OF
BOYS

WEEKLY

WHO MAKE
MONEY.

\$ 50,000 FROM A NICKEL;
OR, THE BOY WHO WAS LUCKY IN STOCKS.

(A WALL STREET STORY) BY A SELF-MADE MAN



"Take him down and stow him away in the little closet behind the ladder," ordered Gaston, pointing at the prisoner. While the confederates were obeying the order, Gwin broke open the tin box and proceeded to examine its contents.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 4, 1910.

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OR,

THE BOY WHO WAS LUCKY IN STOCKS

(A WALL STREET STORY)

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

CASH—ONE NICKEL.

"Well, I've got just one nickel and a letter to a man in Wall Street, which will land me in a job," said Bob Baker, as he stepped ashore from the Albany Day Boat at the foot of Desbrosses Street, one afternoon, about half-past five.

He was a healthy, strapping lad, with a slightly provincial air, and neatly attired in a plain business suit.

In one hand he carried a suitcase which contained all of his worldly possessions that he was able to bring with him.

"I've also got a healthy appetite, but I need the price to satisfy it," he continued, as he looked at the moving procession of trucks and other vehicles passing up and down West street before him.

It was a novel scene to him, for this was his first appearance in New York City.

He had been born and raised in Troy, up the State, and having lately lost his only relative, his mother, which threw him on his own resources, he had come to the metropolis, like many others, to seek his fortune.

"No supper, no bed and no breakfast seems to be the program for the next few hours," he muttered, as he started to thread his way through the teams. "That is what I call tough. When I left Troy I had twenty dollars in my pocket, but some rascal picked my pocket and now I'm on my uppers. Only for the nickel I'd be flat broke. I might just as well be for a nickel hardly counts. There's a small restaurant," he said, as he landed on the sidewalk. "I wonder if the proprietor would give me something to do

in exchange for a meal? He might if I explained the position I'm in."

"Carry yer bag to the stashun for a nickel," said a barefooted youth, gliding up beside him.

"Thanks, but I need the nickel to make my fortune with," replied Bob.

"Aw, what yer givin' me! Be a sport and give a feller a show to make his supper," said the lad.

"I wish I saw a show to make my own," said Bob, so earnestly that the street Arab looked at him.

"You're a gent, ain't yer?" he said.

"I guess not; for gents aren't dead broke, as a rule."

"You ain't broke, cully," grinned the boy.

"I'm so near it there isn't any fun in it."

"Are yer really strapped? What yer been doin' with yer chink? Came off the boat, didn't yer?"

"My pocket was picked on the way down the river, and I've only got a nickel left."

"Yer don't say? Well, wot's the diff'rence. The nickel 'll pay yer way home on the elevated and then you'll be all right."

"I haven't any home to go to."

"Wot! no home?" exclaimed the Arab, looking at Bob in astonishment.

"No. I've just come to New York to go to work."

"Dat's so? Where you come from?"

"Troy."

"Dat's up the river, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Yer a hayseed, ain't yer?" grinned the youth. "But if yer ain't got no money yer can't be took in by dem confi-

dence chaps wot are always on the lookout for fellers dat ain't fly to der game. Where are yer goin' to put up for de night?"

"In one of the parks, I guess."

"Dat's tough. If I had one of me cards wit' me I'd give yer a knock-down to me friend, the proprietor of de Waldorf-'Storia," chuckled the boy.

"Waldorf-'Storia! What place is that?"

"Dat's de swell hotel uptown. Dere are udders, but most all de folks of note stop dere, because it's de proper caper, see?"

"Swell hotel, eh? Say, don't jolly me, young fellow about giving me your card. If you want to do me a favor tell me if you think the boss of that restaurant over there would give me my supper if I offered to work it out."

"I couldn't tell yer, as I'm not on speakin' terms wit' him. I wouldn't like to try him meself. He's chased me two or t'ree times away from his door."

"Say, where do you live, and what's your name?"

"Me name is Pete Swift, and I live wit' me uncle, the mayor."

"Mayor of what?"

"Mayor of Green'ich street," grinned the boy.

"Oh, cut out your kidding!"

"I ain't kiddin'. S'pose yer t'ink dere's only one mayor in New York. Dat's where yer wrong. Besides me uncle, dere's de Mayor of de Bowery, de Mayor of Grand street, de Mayor of——"

"That will do, Pete. I've got to leave you now for I want to forage for a meal, and I can't get one any too quick."

"Sorry to lose yer, but yer ain't told me wot yer name was. Maybe yer've got a card."

"My name is Bob Baker. If you ever want to see me you'll find me in Wall Street."

"Where?"

"Wall Street, where the Stock Exchange is. You know where it is."

"Hully gee! What yer goin' to do in Wall Street wit'out a cent?"

"I've got a job there."

"Wot, already?"

"Yes, I've been recommended to a broker who wants a boy, and who said he'd give me an opening."

"Den yer all right."

"I expect to be to-morrow, but in the meantime, owing to the loss of my twenty dollars I'm on the ragged edge."

"Who is de man yer goin' to work for?"

"You mean what is his name?"

"Yep."

"Philip Gaston."

"Why don't yer look in de directory for his name, den go to his house and tell him how yer fixed. He'll see yer t'rough."

"That isn't a bad idea. I never thought of it. I think I'll do it if I can find a directory."

"Most of de drug stores has 'em. Dey won't charge yer not'in' to look inter it. Everybody does it."

"I'm much obliged for the suggestion, Pete."

"Don't menshun it. Yer welcome. When me automo-

bile is repaired I'll drive over to Wall Street and call on yer. So long!"

Bob decided to try and get supper before he hunted up a city directory, for he was nearly famished.

Accordingly, he walked into the cheap restaurant and put his case before the proprietor.

"You don't look as if you were broke," said the man.

"I am. I was robbed of all my money on the Albany Day Boat."

"Are you a stranger in the city?"

"Yes; but I've got a letter to a Wall Street broker, who's going to give me a job."

"Let's see the letter."

Bob handed him the envelope.

It was addressed to "Philip Gaston, Esq., No. — Wall Street."

"Well," said the man, "I ain't in the habit of trusting strangers. It doesn't pay. But I'll take a chance on you. You can eat a quarter's worth and I'll chalk it up against your honesty. I'll expect you to come around in a few days and settle."

"I'll do it," replied Bob, gratefully. "I expect to borrow some money from Mr. Gaston to-morrow, or to-night, if I can find out where he lives; for I need to hire lodgings for myself right away, and I'll come around and pay you. You are very kind to trust me when you don't know whether you'll ever see me again."

"All right. Sit down at that table and order a quarter's worth."

So Bob sat down and gave his order to the waiter who came up.

When he got through he felt a whole lot better, although the meal was nothing to brag of.

He gave his name to the proprietor and assured him he would call in a day or two and square up.

Then he started up Canal street to find a drug store that had a city directory open to the public.

After going several blocks he found a directory and looked up the name of Philip Gaston.

He found the following:

"Gaston, Philip, stock broker, — Wall street; home, — East 62d street."

"That's him, I guess," thought the boy. "At any rate I'll call there. I hate to spend my last nickel so I'll walk. I wonder how far it is?"

He started up Broadway and in due time reached Fourteenth street.

He rested himself on a bench in Union Square and then continued on to Twenty-third street.

He sat down awhile in Madison Square, as the hour was comparatively early.

He asked the man who sat next to him the shortest route to take to reach the number he wanted.

"Go up Fifth avenue."

"Where is Fifth avenue?" asked Bob.

"That street that comes in yonder," pointing.

Bob thanked him and resumed his tramp.

It was quite a walk to 62d street, but he got there at last, and found that the numbers started from the avenue and went east.

Mr. Gaston lived in one of the big brownstone houses on the first block.

As Bob approached the house, Broker Gaston was seated in his handsome library in company with his cashier, Edward Gwin.

"Yes, Gwin, for six months I have considered myself master of my brother's business and fortune, the revenues of which have been insufficient as yet to discharge the debts which a life of extravagance has charged against me. Now I've just made the astonishing and disquieting discovery that my brother, in atoning for his own follies, has ruined me," said the broker.

"Ruined you, Mr. Gaston!" exclaimed the cashier. "You amaze me!"

"Well, it's a fact. I will explain my situation to you. My late brother, Henry, as you are aware, established the business which I succeeded to by virtue of being heir-at-law. I was his representative in the board-room while you were second bookkeeper."

Mr. Gwin nodded.

"His death made me, as I supposed, his successor. I took charge of everything—the office, this house, his bank accounts and investments—and became for the time being a rich man. I quietly got rid of the old cashier and raised you to that position."

"You did, because I was useful, nay, indispensable to you," said Gwin.

The broker frowned, but went on.

"For six months I have been living in a fool's paradise, and now it appears that I must resign everything, and be content with a salary again, as merely the manager of the business, if the lady choses to continue me in that capacity."

"The lady!" exclaimed the cashier. "What lady?"

"My brother's widow."

"His widow! Why, I wasn't aware that he was married."

"Neither was I, but it appears he was. The proofs forwarded to me from San Francisco appear indisputable. It seems that my brother married a poor girl many years ago when he was in Los Angeles, but tiring of her he deserted the young lady after a few months. Henry was a gay lad in his way. Very much like the old sailor who had a sweetheart in every port. At any rate, he married this respectable young person under an assumed name, and when he pulled up stakes and came East she was unable to trace him."

"Hum!" ejaculated Gwin.

"One of the results of the marriage was a daughter whom he never saw."

"So you have been an uncle for a long time without knowing it," smiled the cashier, grimly.

"It would appear so. My brother wore his marital harness lightly, for he never breathed a word about it to me. I had come to regard him as a confirmed bachelor up to the day of his death. When he was taken down with his last illness, and learned from the doctor that his hours were numbered, his conscience became a bit tender and he called in a young lawyer, unknown to me, had him draw up a will leaving everything to his wife, and dispatched the young attorney west to hunt up the lady. It took the lawyer six

months to accomplish the object of his mission, and during that time I was allowed to come into possession. This morning I received a letter from him, explaining everything and notifying me that he had found my sister-in-law, and would start East with her and her seventeen-year-old daughter, immediately. He regretted the necessity of dispossessing me, but under the circumstances there was no alternative. He presumed, he said, that I would be allowed—hark ye, allowed—to run the brokerage office as manager and representative of the widow. That's how the case stands. Pleasant, isn't it?" satirically.

"Decidedly so," replied Gwin, with a slight laugh. "I should have thought your brother would at least have left the business to you. His widow would have been quite rich enough without it."

"It either did not occur to him to do so, or he chose to make amends for his treatment of his wife as full as was in his power. At any rate, he fixed things so that I now come out at the small end of the horn."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do but yield as gracefully as possible."

"And can you, sir, quietly give up fortune without attempting one effort to retain it?"

"What can be done? The lady, according to the lawyer, has a clear case."

"Can no resolute measures be adopted to resist her claim?"

"None that I see."

"No? To-day you are possessed of affluence. Recognized in Wall Street as your brother's legitimate successor. What will your standing be when the widow takes legal possession of everything?"

"What will it be, Gwin? I hate to figure on it. I will be the butt of much good-natured raillery from my fellow-traders, who will sympathize, more or less sincerely, with me, and——"

"Give you the laugh behind your back," said Gwin. "Can you stand that?"

"I don't see how I can help myself."

"No? You are in possession of your late brother's business and fortune, and that, according to an old adage, is nine points of the law."

"A contest will hardly do more than put off the inevitable result."

"If you will be guided by me there will be no contest."

"Indeed!"

"Promise me \$50,000 if I save the day for you and I will help you out."

"What can you do, Gwin?" asked the broker, in surprise.

"Is it a bargain?"

"I should be glad to make such a bargain if I thought that——"

"Is it a bargain? Will you give me a signed paper to that effect?"

"First explain your plan. If I think well of it I will give you the paper."

"Good! Now listen."

But at that moment there was a ring at the doorbell and the appearance of a servant at the door of the library interrupted the interview.

CHAPTER II.

THE RASCALLY COMPACT.

"Well, what is it?" asked the master of the house, impatiently.

"There is a boy at the door, sir, who wishes to see you."

"A boy! Who is he, and what does he want?"

"He says he has brought a letter of introduction to you."

"Show him into the parlor and I will see him."

The servant retired and piloted Bob Baker, who was the caller, into the parlor.

In a few minutes the broker entered the room.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" he said.

Bob handed him the letter he had brought.

It was not sealed and Mr. Gaston read it.

"So you are Bob Baker to whom I promised the position as messenger in my office?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess you'll do for you look like a smart boy, and my friend Adams recommends you highly. You will report at my office in the morning at nine o'clock. You haven't found lodgings for yourself yet, eh?" he added, glancing at the boy's suitcase.

"No, sir. The fact is, I haven't any money to get any."

"No! How is that?"

Bob explained how he had been cleaned out on the boat by some unknown crook.

"That is the reason I took the liberty of calling at your house to see if you would advance me a few dollars to carry me over."

"How did you find out my residence?"

"From the city directory."

"Very well. Here is a \$10 bill. Now follow me. My cashier happens to be here this evening. I'll introduce you to him."

The broker took Bob into his library and made him acquainted with Gwin.

"He lost his money on the boat coming down," said Mr. Gaston. "Some pickpocket touched him. I have just advanced him \$10. You can charge him with it on the books, and he can return it at his convenience."

"All right," nodded the cashier, carelessly.

"I suppose you're all at sea in this city?" said the broker, looking at Bob.

"Yes, sir; but I'll soon get the hang of things," replied the boy, confidently. "Would you be kind enough to suggest where I had better look for a boarding place?"

"I guess I'd better send somebody with you to find a suitable place," said Mr. Gaston, pushing a button, twice.

Presently a man in house livery appeared.

"William, have you had your dinner?" asked the broker.

"I am eating it now, sir," answered the man, respectfully.

"After you have finished I wish you to take this young man downtown and find him a boarding house within easy reach of the Sixth avenue elevated road."

"Yes, sir."

"A genteel, reasonably priced house. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take him into the parlor now. He will wait there till you are ready."

So Bob was marched back to the parlor, which was illuminated by one electric bulb.

Illuminated is hardly the word, for the room was long, fairly wide and lofty, so that the single bulb only lighted up a little part of it.

The furniture was substantial and the other furnishings costly.

A magnificent large rug, that must have cost \$1,000 or more, covered the center of the floor.

The decoration of the walls and ceiling was as fine as art could make them.

The curtains and hangings of the windows were in perfect keeping with the rest of the room.

Altogether it represented high-class taste and lavish expenditure, and what little Bob was able to see of it quite took his breath.

"Now, sir, we will continue our conversation," said Gwin, as the door closed behind Bob and the second man of the house.

"Well, what plan have you to lay before me?" replied the broker.

"When do you expect your brother's widow to arrive?"

"Probably in a week."

"She and her daughter will be accompanied by the young lawyer whom your brother sent West to find them?"

"I am so advised."

"Have you any idea of the route they will take? Will they leave California by the Southern Pacific road, or by the Central Pacific?"

"I couldn't tell you."

"Then it would be advisable for you to telegraph the lawyer to select his route so as to connect with the Pennsylvania road."

"Why?" asked the broker.

"You have a country residence near Elizabeth."

"My late brother's."

"Exactly. Make the preparations necessary to entertain your sister-in-law there."

"Such was my idea, as I did not wish to leave this house yet awhile."

"In your message say that you will meet the party at Philadelphia and escort the lady and her daughter to Elizabeth, as the New York house is not prepared for their reception."

"I shall do that any way."

"Very good. As soon as they are installed in the country house something may happen then that will prevent them from disturbing you in the possession of your brother's estate."

"Why, what could happen?"

"My dear Gaston, life is very uncertain. Accidents are continually taking place which alter the entire prospects of many people. For instance, after your worthy sister-in-law and her daughter are comfortably fixed at their country home—we will call it theirs under the existing circumstances—the house might catch fire, burn down, and they in it. That would relieve you of the necessity of making a six months' accounting of the estate."

"There isn't one chance in a hundred of such a thing happening."

"No? It is remarkable how people will differ on a subject. Now I think there is every chance of such a catastrophe taking place."

"Perhaps you will explain why you think so?"

"Because it is to your interest that such a thing should take place. It is also to mine."

"Yours?"

"Certainly. I am interested to the extent of \$50,000."

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

"Precisely. You promised to pay me that sum if I helped you out of your predicament."

"Then your plan is to burn the country house down when my sister-in-law and niece are in it, and thus——"

"Secure you in absolute possession of your late brother's estate. That is one of my plans. After I have gone well into the matter I may find some other plan equally as effective and less costly."

"But this is murder, Gwin," cried the broker, aghast.

"There is no occasion for you to give it such a strong term. Accidents will happen in the best regulated households, why not at your country place near Elizabeth?"

"I don't like your scheme, Gwin."

"I am sorry. Have you considered what is at stake? Can you tamely see yourself reduced from wealth to comparative dependence? Have you thought how different your position will be if your brother's widow and child come to the front as the acknowledged heirs of all this property as well as the Wall Street business?"

"Have you thought of the enormity of the crime you have proposed?"

"My dear Mr. Gaston, I never let my mind dwell on the unpleasant side of any matter if I can help it," said the cashier, suavely, drawing a cigar from his pocket and lighting it with a match scratched on the sole of his shoe. "I am thinking at present of the \$50,000. That is a deal pleasanter."

"Gwin, I can't undertake to fall in with your views. Your plan is too——"

"Well?"

"Strenuous, to use an easy name for it. Perhaps as manager I may be able to get along. I will be practically the boss of the business. That's much better than the position I held while my brother was alive."

"Manager—hum! How do you know that you will be manager?"

"What other arrangement would my sister-in-law make? I am the man she will naturally confide in to run the business. I have every detail at my fingers' ends. I am the logical manager."

Gwin smiled sarcastically, while he puffed nonchalantly at his cigar.

"Your points are well taken, Mr. Gaston, but—suppose the lady should decide that she did not care to continue the brokerage business?"

"Not continue a profitable business? Ridiculous."

"There is no accounting for a woman's whims. If you are going to protect yourself you have got to consider the case from all its different angles. Suppose she decided to wind up the business, where would you be? You have

no funds to take it off her hands. At your age, with no money to speak of, you would hardly be able to build up a business. You would lose your seat in the Exchange, for the lady would naturally realize on an asset worth close on to \$100,000. Mark me, sir! I have had experience with women, and I know them. Once your sister-in-law is safely established in this inheritance you will find that matters will not go as you seem to think. You are really nothing to her, and she will soon give you evidence of the fact. Twist this matter as you will, the only hope you have is to fall in with my views and let me help you win out."

The broker stared at his rascally cashier.

"You sit there, Gwin, like the enemy of mankind, tempting me to engage in a crime. You grasp me by the hand and drag me to the verge of an abyss whence I may plunge to everlasting ruin," he said, in a shaking tone.

"What nonsense you are talking, sir! Rouse yourself and be a man."

"A murderer you mean!"

"Pshaw! Double the promised sum and you need take no part in the matter at all. Guarantee me \$100,000—that's but a tenth part of the value of the estate—and I'll engage to clear your path of the obstacles that now obstruct it."

Gwin dropped his former soft tone and spoke with some energy.

"I will be your accomplice, just the same," said Gaston.

"Well, that can't be helped; but the chief risk will be mine."

"I must consider the matter."

"There is nothing to consider. You must agree to my plan or step down and out of the property. Which is it to be?"

"I agree," said the broker, desperately.

"Good! The business is already half accomplished. Where there's a will there always is a way. Permit me to use your desk and I will draw up the paper which you are to sign. Then we will be hand-in-glove, and success is bound to be yours, while I will be well provided for."

The cashier seated himself at the desk close by and began to write.

CHAPTER III.

BOB'S INTRODUCTION TO WALL STREET.

In the meantime, William took Bob downtown with him and found a suitable boarding place for the boy in West Twenty-third street, near Sixth avenue.

He explained to Bob that he was to go down to Rector street in the morning on a train and follow the crowd across the bridge into the Empire office building, and through the ground corridor of the building to Broadway.

"The first street diagonally across the way, to your left, is Wall Street," he said. "You can't miss it. Then all you have to do is to walk down to the Brown Building, on the south side of the street, and tell the elevator man to let you out on the third floor. You'll see Mr. Gaston's name on the front suite of offices."

"Thanks," said Bob. "I'll get there all right."

Being tired, he went to bed right away, and next morning he was the first one at the breakfast table.

It was only eight o'clock when he got through, so he thought he would take a walk up Sixth avenue.

He went as far as Thirty-third street, where the avenue is intersected by Broadway, and there is a station, and then took a train downtown.

He didn't use his solitary nickel of the day before, as he determined to keep that as a reminder of the time when he landed in the city with only five cents to his name.

"If I ever get wealthy I'll have a gold rim put around that nickel, with a hole in it, and use it as a watch charm," he said.

He reached the office without any trouble, but found it locked.

He waited till one of the junior clerks came with a key and opened up.

Bob followed him inside.

"Got a message for Mr. Gaston?" asked the clerk, looking at him inquiringly.

"No; I've come here to work."

"Oh, you've got the job of messenger, eh? What's your name?"

Bob told him, and learned that the clerk's name was Tom Brush.

"Live in this city?" asked Brush, who seemed to take a fancy to Bob.

"Yes. I'm boarding in West Twenty-third street. I came from Troy."

"Lately?"

"Yesterday afternoon, by the Albany Day Boat."

"You don't say! Ever been in New York before?"

"No."

"Then you've a lot to learn."

"It won't take me long to pick things up."

"I guess not. You look bright."

"What will I have to do here? Carry messages?"

"Yes; that will be your chief duty, but there are lots of other things you'll have to attend to. I was messenger myself here for three years, and as you're green the boss may put me to teaching you the ropes. I'll give you one tip right now. You want to keep a sharp lookout that Mr. Gwin, our cashier, doesn't catch you napping. It was on his account that our last messenger quit."

"I was introduced to him at Mr. Gaston's house last night."

"Were you up to the boss's house?"

"Yes. I'll say that I don't think a whole lot of Cashier Gwin. I'm a pretty good judge of human nature, and it's my opinion he's rather scaley. He seems to be pretty thick with Mr. Gaston."

"They always have been thick. Before Mr. Henry Gaston died, six months ago, the present boss, who came into all of his property, was only a side issue in the office, so to speak. He represented the house at the Exchange, but had no real authority. Mr. Gwin was only second book-keeper then. When the business came into the hands of the present Mr. Gaston he got rid of the old cashier and put his friend Gwin in his place. It has made a whole

lot of difference with us chaps, I can tell you. Here comes the margin clerk. I'll introduce you to him."

The clerks came in fast, and Brush made Bob acquainted with them all.

He also introduced him to Miss Sidney, the stenographer.

Last of all, Gwin came in.

He called Bob to his desk, asked him a number of questions, including the address of his boarding place, and then called Brush over and instructed him to take the new messenger around the district for a day or two until he learned where the more important office buildings were, and such other places as he was likely to be sent to.

By that time Mr. Gaston made his appearance.

After he had gone through the mail, dictated such replies as were necessary and seen a couple of callers, he sent out for Bob.

He gave the boy a general outline of what would be expected of him, told him what his wages would be, and said that Brush would show him the ropes.

Brush was kept on the run that day and the next, carrying messages, and running errands, and Bob accompanied him everywhere, taking note of whatever his companion called his attention to.

After they returned from the bank, where Brush had carried the day's deposits, on the second day, the junior clerk reported to Gwin that he guessed Bob was able to go out by himself now.

The cashier called Bob up and examined him as to the location of a number of office buildings, the Exchange and other places, and the boy didn't make a single slip.

"I guess you'll do, Baker," he said. "You can go on now. To-morrow you will go out alone."

That afternoon Bob found his way to the restaurant where he was indebted for his supper on the afternoon of his arrival in town.

The proprietor was reading a paper at the counter.

"I've come to pay you that quarter," said Bob.

"What quarter?" asked the man, not immediately recognizing him.

"I'm the boy you trusted for a meal, three days ago. Don't you remember?"

"Now I recollect you. So you've come around to settle, have you?"

"Yes, sir," and Bob laid down a quarter.

"Well, you're an honest boy," said the man, sweeping the money into his drawer. "You're just about one in a hundred. Did you get the job you expected in Wall Street?"

"Yes. I'm messenger for a broker."

"I wish you luck. If you ever get hard pushed for a meal, come around and I'll trust you again."

As Bob stepped outside he ran against Pete Swift, who was selling afternoon papers now.

Pete recognized him at once.

"Hello, cully!" he said. "Whatcher doin' 'round here? How about dat Wall Street posish?"

"I've got it," replied Bob.

"What are yer—president of a bank?"

"I'm a broker's messenger."

"Is dat all? How many bones a week does it pan out?"

"I get seven dollars."

"I wouldn't mind havin' yer job; but I guess me clothes in't good enough for Wall Street. Yer see, I owe me tailor for de last soot, and he won't trust me no more."

"That's too bad!" laughed Bob.

"Dat's why me wardrobe ain't up-to-date."

"Why don't you ask your uncle, the mayor, to buy you an outfit?"

"I ain't got no uncle. I was only givin' yer taffy dat day."

"Where do you live, then?"

"Nowheres in pertic'lar. I roost out in carts when I can't get into Billy Lange's stable."

"How do you manage in the winter?"

"De best way I kin."

"Selling papers now, eh? Give me one. Here's a nickel. Keep the change."

"T'anks! Yer a brick! I wish yer was a reg'lar customer."

"Well, good-by. Hope to see you again some time."

"Good-by, boss. When me ship comes in you'll see me around in Wall Street blowin' de boodle in on stocks."

Bob walked up Desbrosses street to the Ninth avenue elevated station, and was soon on his way to his boarding house.

Next morning he started in on his messenger duties in earnest, and no fault was found with him by the cashier.

The fourth day of his experience was Saturday, and at half-past twelve he received a full week's wages.

Gwin also complimented him on his rapid progress in getting acquainted with the Street.

"The cashier seems to be giving you the velvet hand," said Brush, as they walked out of the office together. "Don't forget that he has sharp claws. He may treat you all right for a week or two, but sooner or later he'll show his real character and you'll be in hot water unless you look out sharp."

"I don't intend to give him any cause to find fault with me," replied Bob.

"He'll find some cause if he can. At any rate, that's the way he treated the last messenger. He made things so hot for the young fellow that he got out."

"Well, I can't afford to lose the job, so I'll be careful not to have a run-in with him. I'm much obliged for the tip."

"That's all right. I want to see you get along."

They parted at the corner of Broadway, and Bob took a surface car uptown for a change and spent the afternoon in Central Park.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NICKEL GETS BUSY.

Bob took to the messenger business like a duck to water and made good from the start.

The clerks noticed that the cashier was unusually friendly toward him, and they wondered if he was trying to throw the new boy off his guard.

On Thursday morning, Broker Gaston came to the office in a cab, which was not his custom.

When he got out at the Brown Building he had a suitcase in his hand, which seemed to indicate he was going somewhere out-of-town.

Bob was seated in his chair about noon, waiting to be called on, when Gaston's bell rang.

The new messenger went into his room to see what he wanted.

"Call a cab for me," said the broker.

Bob knew he would find one of those vehicles on Broad street, so he started off, and in ten minutes reported that the cab was at the door.

He found the broker and his cashier engaged in earnest conversation.

"Take my suitcase down and put it in the cab. Wait there till I come," said Mr. Gaston.

Bob did as he was told, and five minutes later the trader made his appearance and drove off toward Broadway.

The boy had heard him tell the driver to take him to the Cortlandt street ferry, so he guessed the boss was going somewhere on a trip.

Bob had already got on friendly terms with several messengers, but the one he liked the best was a curly-headed lad namd Will Sparks.

Next morning, Gwin sent him with a note to a Beaver street wine merchant, and just as he reached the place he met Sparks.

"Hello, Baker!" said Will. "Where bound?"

"In here," replied Bob.

"Going to purchase a case of champagne for your private consumption?" laughed the other messenger.

"Hardly. Our cashier sent me here, and if this note is an order for liquor it is for him or the boss."

"Most likely for the boss. He's got to be a pretty swell guy since he came into his brother's shoes. I don't wonder, for Henry Gaston was said to be a millionaire."

"And his brother, my boss, got it all, so Tom Brush, of our office, told me."

"Yes, that's what he did, because his brother was a bachelor and had no one else to leave it to."

"It's a wonder he never got married. He lived in great style in the house where my boss lives now. And Brush says he's got a dandy country place somewhere near Elizabeth, in New Jersey. Maybe that's where Mr. Gaston was bound yesterday when I got him a cab to take him and his suitcase to the Cortlandt street ferry."

"Probably. It's a fine thing to be rich. If I had a few thousand dollars now I could make a big haul."

"How could you?"

"I got hold of a dandy tip awhile ago, but it's no use to me because I haven't any money to back it."

"What's the tip?"

"Have you any money? If you have I'll let you in on a sure thing for ten per cent. of what you'll make out of it."

"No. I've only got ninety cents in my clothes."

"Ninety cents! That's several times more than I have, but it wouldn't help you work the tip. You'd want at least \$50 so as to buy five shares of the stock."

"What stock?"

"What's the use of telling you if you can't use it?"

"If you'll tell me I'll let you gaze on my lucky nickel," laughed Bob.

"Have you got a lucky nickel?"

"I don't know whether it's lucky or not, but the other night I dreamed that I should make \$50,000 out of it."

"Fifty thousand out of a nickel—that's pretty good! Let's look at it."

Bob fished his special nickel out of his vest pocket.

He had it wrapped up in a piece of paper.

"One would think that was a rare coin."

"It's rare with me, at any rate," said Bob, taking it from the paper and handing it to Sparks.

"Why do you think that is lucky, because of your dream?"

"Yes, and because it was the only bit of money I had in my clothes when I landed in this city, last week."

"The only piece, eh? I suppose you had a bank draft, or a money-order in your pocket?"

"You suppose wrong. I had twenty dollars and fifty-five cents in my pocket when I left Troy in the morning. That was all the money I had in the world. I spent fifty cents on the boat for a meal."

"That left you twenty dollars and the nickel."

"Yes, but some rascal picked my pocket of the twenty."

"The dickens! That was rough."

"You bet it was!"

"How did you get along, then?"

Bob related the incidents of that momentous afternoon, holding the nickel in his fingers.

When he finished his story he started to wrap his nickel up again.

In some way it slipped out of his fingers, struck the sidewalk on its edge and rolling toward the iron grating that admitted light to the cellar of the liquor store, disappeared through two of the bars.

Bob made a futile grab at it, and then knelt down and peered through the grating to see if he could see it anywhere below.

"That's the last of your lucky nickel," laughed Sparks. "You'll never make \$50,000 out of that now."

"That's too bad. I didn't want to lose that. I must ask permission to go down into the cellar and look for it," said Bob.

"I wish you luck finding it. So long!" and Will Sparks walked away.

Bob entered the store, handed his note to a clerk, who read it and then nodded his head, as much as to say, "all right."

"Say," said the boy, "can I go down in your cellar?"

"What for?" asked the clerk.

"I dropped a pocket-piece through the grating outside and I want to get it."

"All right. You'll find the stairs in yonder corner. There is a door that will let you out under the grating. Draw the bolt and when you have found your coin, bolt it again."

Bob hastened down into the cellar and made his way out under the grating.

He looked carefully around, but saw no signs of his precious nickel.

He didn't want to poke about, for that would be likely

to cover his coin up or push it into some crevice where it would be a goner.

He struck a match to assist his search, and at last he saw the nickel lying on top of what appeared to be a mildewed pocketbook.

He grabbed the coin and then picked up the other article.

It was a pocketbook which had evidently been lying there a long time.

"I wonder if there is anything in it?" he asked himself. "Feels as if there was something."

He opened it carefully and was astonished to see a wad of bills, the outside one being a fiver.

"Gee! This is a find!" he exclaimed, in some excitement.

Then he recollected that it was not his because he found it, if it were possible for him to locate the owner.

He took the money out and shoved it in his pocket and examined the wallet for some clew to the owner.

There was nothing in it that showed to whom it belonged, so he tossed it down.

"The money is mine after all," he said, in a tone of satisfaction. "I must see how much it amounts to."

He counted his find and discovered that the bills footed up \$582.

"That nickel is lucky, upon my word. Seemed as if it scented that money down here, wriggled out of my fingers, ran through the grating and dropped right on top of the wallet. If that was published in the papers the readers would call it a fish story. I begin to think that dream of mine is going to come true. Just think of \$50,000 from a nickel! That's going some. Yet stranger things have happened, I guess."

He made his way back to the store, told the clerk he had found his nickel, thanked him for letting him go into the cellar, and started back to his office.

On the way he thought about Will Sparks's tip.

"I must get him to tell me about it. If he can prove it's a good winner I will buy some of the stock on margin and give him ten per cent. of whatever I make out of the deal."

When he got off that afternoon, about half-past three, he felt hungry and went to a lunch house for a sandwich and a cup of coffee.

He saw Sparks perched on a stool at the counter and seated himself beside him.

"Find your lucky nickel?" asked Will, with a grin.

"I did."

"Then you've still got a chance to make that \$50,000."

"I'm going to make it," said Bob, confidently.

"When you get old and gray-headed, eh?"

"No, long before that."

"You'll never make it out of that nickel, though."

"That's as much as you know about it. That nickel is going to make it. It's got to work already."

"Has it? How?"

"Never mind. It's put some money in my pocket. Now if you'll let me in on that tip, and I'm lucky, it will put some money in your pocket, too."

"How much have you got to invest?"

"Enough to buy fifty shares of any stock on margin."

"What, five hundred dollars?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get it so suddenly?"

"I robbed a bank since I saw you," chuckled Bob.

"I guess you're jollying me about having five hundred dollars."

"No, I'm not. Want to see my wad?"

"Yes."

Bob pulled out the roll of bills and showed him.

"I guess that belongs to your office."

"No, it doesn't. That's my property."

"If you were broke when you came to the city last week I don't see how you could get hold of so much money."

"My lucky nickel steered me on to it."

"How did it?"

"It might queer my luck if I told you."

"Are you superstitious?"

"Not particularly. But how about that tip?"

"Will you use it if I give it to you?"

"I will if you can show it's a winner."

"I'll show you in about two shakes of a cat's tail. Wait till we get outside. I don't want anybody else to hear what I tell you."

They paid their checks and left the lunch house.

When they got on the street Will told Bob all about his tip.

He had learned accidentally that A. & C. shares were being cornered by a powerful syndicate with the intention of booming the price, and then unloading the stock on the public at its advanced valuation.

"If you mean business, Bob, come right up to the little bank on Nassau street. You've got eight minutes to make the deal in before the brokerage department closes for the day."

"I'm on," said Bob, who had the utmost confidence in the idea that his lucky nickel was pointing the way to \$50,000.

The boys hurried up to the bank and Bob put his deal through.

"Hold on till it goes up between ten and fifteen points and then sell out at once," said Will.

"It's 86 now," said Bob.

"It's bound to go to par, at any rate. You can risk it as high as that," replied Will.

"All right. I'll take your word for it, for I'm rather green yet in market speculation."

"You won't be green long, for I'll gamble on it this won't be your only deal. When a fellow wins out he's always crazy to try his luck again. That's why most of the lambs lose. You're working on a sure tip now, so the chances are in your favor. You want to be careful when you are going it blind, like most of the outside speculators have to do," said Will.

"Never mind about the future. The present is what I'm interested in."

"You ought to clear \$500, of which I expect you to hand over \$50."

"I'll do it. My word is as good as my bond," said Bob.

The two boys then went home.

CHAPTER V.

BOB OVERHEARS A PIECE OF VILLAINY.

When Cashier Gwin came into the office next morning he carried a suitcase.

Apparently he was going out of town that afternoon to spend Sunday somewhere.

"I'll bet he's going down to the boss's country place at Elizabeth," thought Bob. "It's a fine thing to be the particular friend of the man you work for. I wish I were going out of town, too."

Gwin paid off the hands at noon, half an hour earlier than usual.

The books and papers were put away in the big safe, the cashier locked it, and by a quarter past twelve all hands were filing out of the office.

"Come and have lunch with me, Bob," said Tom Brush.

"All right. Where are we going—Delmonico's?"

"Well, hardly. That establishment is too rich for my pocketbook. I need my money more than Delmonico does. We'll go to a little place on Beaver street, where you can get filled up for half a dollar, with a pint of vin ordinaire thrown in."

"You can have my pint, for I don't drink wine," said Bob.

"You take beer, don't you?"

"No. Nothing stronger than soda or sarsaparilla."

"It's just as well. You're a boy yet."

"I hope I won't drink anything stronger when I get to be a man."

"A highball once in awhile won't hurt you. You'll have to hold your end up when you're out with your friends."

"I've seen chaps who tried to hold their end up, but in the end couldn't hold themselves up. The spectacle was quite instructive."

"They went too far."

"That's the trouble. When a fellow drinks in company he never knows where to draw the line. It's better not to drink at all."

By this time they had reached the restaurant and Brush led the way in.

"What are you going to do with yourself this afternoon?" asked Brush, as they were eating their dessert.

"I was going up to Harlem to see what kind of place it is."

"You can see it any time. Suppose you come along with me?"

"Where to?"

"Elizabeth. I've got a married sister there, and it's about time I paid her another visit. I'll pay my respect to her, introduce you, and then we'll take a stroll around the town. After supper we'll return to good old New York."

"Elizabeth is where the boss has his country residence."

"Yes. We can find out where it is and have a look at it."

"I'll go with you, and thank you for the invitation."

"Don't mention it. The favor is on your side, for you are giving me the benefit of your society."

On leaving the restaurant they walked to the Cortlandt

street ferry, where Brush bought tickets to Elizabeth and return, for them both.

The time-table showed them that they were just in time to catch a local train.

In due course they alighted at the station in Elizabeth and made their way to the home of Brush's sister, who was the wife of a bookkeeper employed in the town.

Bob found the young matron a charming hostess.

"We're going out to see the neighborhood and Mr. Gaston's country place, if we can find it," said Tom Brush, at length. "We'll be back in time to take supper with you and Fred."

"Be sure and return here not later than six, because Fred and I are going to a moving-picture show this evening," said his sister.

"We'll be on hand, don't you worry," replied Tom. "Come on, Bob."

They walked around town for an hour and then they dropped in at the post-office and made inquiries about Gaston's country residence.

They were told where it was, about a mile out, and directed how to reach it.

"A mile isn't much of a walk, and I dare say we shall pass some pretty houses along our route," said Tom Brush. So they started for the suburbs.

They were nearing their destination when they suddenly heard a scream inside of a house they were passing.

"I wonder what's wrong?" said Bob.

A second scream followed and then the front door was swung open and a young man rushed out with a small bundle under his arm.

"Help! Thieves! Help!" screamed a woman.

The young man vaulted the fence and ran up the street.

"Help! Stop him, he's a thief!" cried the woman, coming to the door.

That was enough for Bob, and he started after the fellow with a rush.

Tom Brush followed.

The man with the bundle glanced behind and seeing that he was being pursued, put on a spurt, but Bob was a swift runner and overhauled him rapidly.

The pace proved too hot for Brush, and he fell behind.

Seeing that he couldn't outrun Bob, the crook suddenly jumped a low stone wall into an extensive grounds and darted toward the handsome residence that stood close by.

The boy was close at his heels when he disappeared around the corner of the house.

When Bob turned the corner he was surprised to see no signs of the fugitive.

A low French window, one side of which stood open close to the ground, suggested the idea to the young messenger that the thief had entered the house in order to throw him off the scent.

"He won't fool me that way," thought Bob, who immediately stepped in through the window himself.

He found himself in a small room furnished as a library, and was connected with a wide hall by a door.

Two sides and a half of the apartment were furnished with bookcases, filled with books of all sizes and binding, many of them valuable on account of their rarity and for other reasons.

Above the bookcases were handsome steel engravings.

Near the window was a desk and a pivot chair.

"He has gone through that door," muttered Bob. "Perhaps is standing on the other side, waiting for me to get out of the way. I'll give him the surprise of his life if he is."

As Bob walked toward the door he heard a stealthy foot-fall outside.

"Maybe he's coming back to take a look out of the window to see if the coast is clear. I'll hide in that closet beside the desk and nab him when he goes to the window."

Thus speaking, the boy glided into the closet, the door of which stood ajar, and closed the door to a crack.

Hardly had he ensconced himself in the closet when the other door was opened and two men walked into the room.

The last one in locked the door, while the other walked to the window, shut it and put the catch on.

Bob, looking through the crack, was not a little astonished to recognize his employer, Philip Gaston, and the cashier, Edward Gwin.

Clearly the house he had entered was the country home of the broker.

He felt that he had placed himself in a very embarrassing situation.

He hesitated to step forth and explain how he came to be in the house, and why he had taken refuge in the closet.

Neither of the gentlemen might believe him, and he stood in danger of being discharged from the office, which he could hardly afford.

While trying to make up his mind what he ought to do, the right opportunity passed and things transpired that held him spellbound where he was.

"Now, Mr. Gaston, we'll get down to business," said Gwin, as the broker seated himself at the desk facing him. "While your sister-in-law and her daughter were out riding this morning with you I fixed everything so as to insure the success of the accidental catastrophe. The nearest engine house is a mile away, and I have put the hydrant on the corner out of business."

"It seems a pity to destroy this beautiful house, but I suppose there is no other way," replied the broker.

"None that is safe. You treated the young lawyer so nicely that he has no suspicions as to the sincerity of the welcome you extended to your dead brother's wife and her daughter, the heiress. He will come here to dinner to-morrow, at your invitation, but if everything works right, he will find only a smoldering ruin, while the corpses of the two obstacles will be in an undertaking establishment. That no suspicion may attach to you, a telegram will arrive about the time we are at dinner to-night, summoning you to New York on important business. You will go, leaving me to earn the \$50,000 you agreed to give me to secure you in undisturbed possession of the property and the business in Wall Street."

"My conscience smites me when I consider the terrible death you have selected for your victims."

"My dear Mr. Gaston, there will be nothing terrible about it whatever. Before the two ladies retire I will see that they are treated to a glass of sherry. The wine will be drugged, so that after they have retired they will sink

into a dreamless sleep and will have no realization of what happens to them afterward."

"Well, you are the doctor. I have left the matter entirely to you. At any rate, you will be well paid, and your conscience seems to trouble you very little about the way in which you earn the money," said the broker.

The cashier laughed softly.

"Conscience!" he said. "Only a few timid people are troubled with such a thing in these enlightened days. Has Wall Street any conscience? Do not the kings of finance coolly engineer a coupe in securities which they know will result in the ruin of thousands of confiding investors? Do the multitude buy stocks when the market is flat and prices low? No, because they are fools. The Wall Street barons have their measure and boost prices to fictitious standards to make the lambs—I call them gulls—bite. When the money magnates have unloaded at high prices what they purchased at bed-rock figures, do they feel any compunction? None in the least, as you know. They merely study how to repeat the operation on a fresh lot of the uninitiated. They manipulate matters so that these same securities are depressed. If necessary to accomplish their purpose they bring on a panic. The bottom drops out of values. Everything tumbles. Then these financial giants apparently rush to the rescue of the situation by buying in at low figures what they sold out at high ones. Then they are in the position to start the ball rolling once more in the same old groove. Could they do this if their consciences were tender? Bah! There is no such thing as conscience."

"I see you have Wall Street down fine, Gwin," chuckled Gaston.

"Why shouldn't I? I have spent nearly all my life in the Street. I have not been asleep, I assure you, sir."

"In matters of business I'll admit that conscience plays little part. The pace is too swift for one to stop and think. It is different in your case. You have gone deliberately to work to murder two unsuspecting persons, and yet your hand is as steady and your manner as composed as I have ever seen them. You are a most accomplished assassin."

"Thank you for the compliment," grinned the cashier. "I am doing this out of regard for you, my dear friend. To save you from utter financial downfall."

"Say rather for the sum of \$50,000, which I have agreed to pay you for your services in this matter."

"For both. You are useful to me and therefore it is to my interest to keep you on top. I might as well tell the truth, for we are both involved in this case, and may yet be in others that will not bear too close inspection."

"Hum!" ejaculated the broker, with an uncomfortable look.

"Now that the train is laid, and everything ready for the inevitable, I think I will touch you for a check for \$25,000 as an evidence of good faith on your part."

"But, Mr. Gwin, you might fail to carry out this plan of yours, in which case I should be indebted to the estate for a large sum which I never could repay," protested Mr. Gaston, who evidently objected to the "touch."

"I shall not fail, don't you worry."

"The best-laid schemes of men sometimes go astray."

"There is too much at stake for me to take any chances. As it isn't possible for me to cash your check before Monday, if by any mischance I should slip up, I will return it to you. But I assure you that within twelve hours you will have ample evidence that I have earned the money."

"Very well," said the broker, reluctantly, "I'll give you the check."

He opened his desk, took out his check-book, drew up and signed the check, and handed it to his accomplice.

"Thanks! Now I shall finish the business with an easy mind," said Gwin.

"When do you propose to fire the house?"

"I propose merely to fire the room where the women are in bed. While you were away with them showing them the neighborhood I soaked the room with an inflammable chemical, which gives out no smell and dries quickly. It has the property, however, of rendering all it touches particularly tinder-like. The room will burn like shavings, and two minutes from the time it is ignited will be a sea of flames. I will be ready to give the alarm at once so that the servants can escape. I will make a big bluff to save your new relatives, but, of course, that will be impossible, and to-morrow morning's papers will record the melancholy particulars. When you go to breakfast you should be able to eat with a hearty appetite, knowing that now you are the indisputable possessor of all your brother's fortune."

"'Tis a bad deed, but I've passed the Rubicon and needs must when the Old Boy drives. I'm afraid that I never could face the sympathetic grins of the boys if I had to abdicate in favor of my late brother's hitherto unsuspected matrimonial partner."

"Of course you couldn't, Mr. Gaston, so you ought to feel deeply grateful to me for coming to your rescue," said the cashier.

"Well, the ladies must be wondering what has happened to us. It is wrong for us to throw them, strangers as they feel themselves to be, on their own resources."

"I agree with you, Mr. Gaston. It behooves us to make their last hours on earth as pleasant as possible," grinned Gwin.

As the two men rose and started for the door there was a sudden crash in the closet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TABLES ARE TURNED ON BOB.

The broker and his rascally cashier stopped and looked at the closet with a startled expression on their countenances.

The sound was the smashing of glassware, and might have been caused by the accidental displacement of some carelessly placed article.

Men, however, who have been concocting villainy are apt to be nervous, even when apparently cool and collected.

"Something fell in the closet," said Gwin.

"I heard it. One of the house cats might have got in there," said Gaston.

"I think it will bear investigation," said the cashier. "I don't believe a cat was responsible for the noise, for I hear no further sounds."

"Well, open the closet and see what happened."

The closet door, however, to the men's astonishment and consternation, opened of itself and Bob stepped out and confronted them.

Knowing from their words that discovery was inevitable the boy decided to act first.

Far from being nervous and embarrassed he was quite cool.

He had heard that which placed both his employer and the cashier in his power, consequently he did not fear what action either might take.

"Bob!" ejaculated Mr. Gaston, aghast.

"Baker!" exclaimed the cashier, simultaneously.

"Yes, gentlemen. I presume you wish an explanation of my presence in this room," answered the young messenger, calmly.

"Naturally," said Gwin. "It seems to be in order. How came you here?"

"I chased a thief into this house. At least I believed at the time that he came in, and it is quite possible he did enter and then made his exit through some other door."

"A thief! You chased a thief in here!" exclaimed the cashier. "Ridiculous! But admitting that you did, how is it that you are in Elizabeth?"

"Mr. Brush invited me to come here with him to call on his married sister. We then walked out to put in a couple of hours seeing the town, and came this way because we were told that your country residence," looking at the broker, "was somewhere around here, and we were curious to take a look at it."

"Indeed," said Mr. Gaston.

"And Mr. Brush, is he in the closet, too?" asked Gwin, in a sarcastic tone.

"No, sir; the closet is hardly large enough to accommodate us both."

"It seems large enough to hold you, at any rate. Why did you hide yourself in it?"

"I will explain," and Bob told how he and Brush had seen a thief run out of a dwelling on the cross street, how they chased him, and how he (Bob) had followed him into the grounds, not knowing that he was on Mr. Gaston's property.

"Admitting all these facts to be true, why did you not show yourself the moment Mr. Gaston and I entered the room?" asked Gwin.

"That is what I should have done, I admit, but——"

"Well?" said the cashier, sharply.

"After what transpired in here between you two gentlemen I am beginning to think that Providence had a hand in bringing me here."

"Indeed!" sneered Gwin. "You overheard all of our conversation, of course?"

"Every word," replied the boy, looking the man squarely in the eye.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"That is for you gentlemen to say."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That is a hint, I suppose, that you can be bought off?" said the broker.

"No, sir. You haven't got money enough to buy me. You must abandon your scheme to set fire to this house for the purpose of destroying two persons who, it is clear, stand in your path, Mr. Gaston. You ought to be thankful that heaven has thwarted your infamous project by sending me here to stop it."

While Bob was talking, Gwin was busy thinking.

He realized that both he and the broker were in the boy's power.

The lad must be silenced.

He was not in favor of buying Bob off, supposing such a thing could be accomplished, and which the lad's words indicated was impossible.

The cashier saw that his anticipated reward was in grave peril, and he did not propose to lose it without making a desperate effort.

Gaston might be willing to throw up the scheme, now that he faced exposure, but the wily cashier did not propose to yield an inch.

One more life sacrificed would amount to nothing to him, for he intended to commit murder anyway, so Bob's fate was quickly settled in his mind.

"What are we going to do, Gwin?" asked Gaston, in a perturbed way.

"Do? Throw up the project, I suppose, for our messenger has us where the hair is short," he replied, carelessly.

"If we give up the plan can we rely on you to keep the matter secret?" said the broker to Bob.

"Yes. I have no wish to injure either of you," replied the boy.

"I will raise your wages to ten dollars or even twelve, and make it all right with you in other ways."

"You are not obliged to do that. I am not selling my silence, I am giving it to you. Some people probably would take advantage of this chance to bleed you, but I'm not one of the kind. You can thoroughly rely on my word."

"At any rate I'll have to take it."

"We can trust him," said Gwin. "A boys who has no price may be relied on. I guess there is nothing further to be said. We'll bind the bargain with a drink and then Baker can rejoin Brush."

"I don't drink," replied Bob. "I'll leave that to you two gentlemen. If you have nothing further to say I'll go. Before I leave town, however, I shall notify the fire department that the hydrant on the corner is out of order."

Gwin darted a look of malice at him.

"Our young friend seems anxious to go," he said, suavely. "You had better show him out by the front door, Mr. Gaston."

"That is unnecessary. I can go out by opening this window," replied Bob.

"Yes, you can, if we let you," said the cashier, in a tense tone.

"Let me? I don't think you will attempt to stop me."

"On second thought, I have concluded that you are too dangerous to our interests to be allowed at liberty."

"You will find me much more dangerous to your interests if you attempt to interfere with me in any way. You

have my word that I will say nothing, and I have yours that you will give up your villainous scheme. I shall not be dangerous to your interests unless you make me so, so you see the matter is entirely in your own hands. What more can you ask?"

Bob turned to undo the catch of the window.

Gwin, with a murderous glare in his eyes, sprang upon him and bore him to the floor.

"You shall never leave this house to repeat what you have learned in this room, young man!" he hissed, as he gripped the boy by the throat.

The cashier found, however, that the strong Troy lad was not an easy proposition to handle.

Bob broke his grip and smashed him in the face.

"Help me, Gaston; this boy must be secured at all hazard!" cried the cashier.

"I thought we had arranged matters with him," said the broker, who was surprised by Gwin's change of front.

"I am not such a fool as to trust him, even if you are. Isn't there something in the closet that we can tie him with?"

"There's a curtain cord."

"Get it and tie his arms while I hold him down. Be quick about it or he'll get away from me."

The broker, who seemed to be dominated to a considerable extent by the strong will of his accomplice, got the cord and proceeded to bind the boy's hands and arms.

In a few minutes Bob was rendered helpless.

Gwin then gagged the boy with his own handkerchief.

"Now we must get him up to that small unoccupied room on the third floor," said the cashier. "Look out and see if the hall is clear."

Broker Gaston looked out and said there was no one in sight.

"Grab his feet, while I take him by the shoulders," said Gwin. "Make haste. We have no time to lose."

Between them the two men carried Bob up to the room in question.

Gwin partly unbound the boy and then tied him to the foot-post of the small brass bed.

"I guess he's safe for the present," he said. "Come with me. I want to talk with you, Gaston."

A moment later Bob heard the key turned in the lock, and then he thoroughly realized that he was a prisoner in the power of two unscrupulous rascals.

CHAPTER VII.

BOB GETS ON TOP.

"I wonder what they intend to do with me?" Bob asked himself. "Mr. Gaston is bad enough, but he isn't in it with the cashier. Gwin is a dyed-in-the-wool scoundrel. I don't wonder all the clerks in the office are afraid of him. I'm afraid he is figuring on carrying out his plan to set fire to the house and burn up that lady and her daughter, who seem to have turned up in an unexpected way as claimants to the estate left by the late Henry Gaston. If the boss's brother really had a wife and daughter, it's

funny that the fact does not seem to be known in Wall Street. He seems to have been regarded as a bachelor by everybody. Evidently she must be in a position to prove her relationship or Mr. Gaston would not be so anxious to get her, as well as her daughter, out of the way. I'm afraid I've got myself in a bad box. If those men decide to go on with their plan they will consider it necessary to do me up, too, in order to avoid exposure and punishment. The way things now stand, I am unable to save either the ladies or myself."

In the meantime, Gaston and Gwin had returned to the library.

"There's only one thing to be done," said the cashier. "This meddling boy must be included in the conflagration."

"I am sorry we didn't let him go. I am sure he would not have betrayed us," said the broker.

"But we would have had to give up our project. That would mean the loss of everything to you as well as the reward to me. No. Mr. Gaston, I have gone into this thing with the intention of seeing it through, and I'm going to do it."

"And that means another life must be sacrificed."

"Well, that's not our lookout. The boy butted in and must take the consequences. He's an orphan and no one will miss him."

"I'm afraid when his body is found it will lead to complications."

"There won't be enough left of him to establish his identity."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"Leave that to me."

"I see there is no use arguing with you, Gwin."

"Not the slightest. I've made up my mind to earn that \$50,000, and I'm going to do it. You start for New York when you get that telegram I've arranged to have sent, and leave me play the game alone."

"If I was sure there would be no slip——"

"Look here, Gaston, you ought to know me by this time. I never do things by halves. This scheme is too dangerous to take any chances with. A slip means a life sentence or the gallows for us. I'm not looking for either, consequently I mean to make a sure thing of it."

Ten minutes later the rascals rejoined the ladies in the elegant sitting-room on the second floor, and no one to look at them would have suspected that their smiling faces hid the blackest of thoughts.

Two hours went by and then dinner was announced.

By that time it was getting dark.

Bob, after many desperate efforts, had succeeded in freeing himself from the cord, and was now figuring on how he could get out of the room.

The door was impracticable, for it was locked on the outside.

The window was the only avenue open to him.

He opened it and looked out.

There was no way of escaping down the side of the house, but by the exercise of nerve he might pass to the window of an adjoining room.

That window was partially open to admit the air at the top.

By holding on to the top sash of his window and reaching out with the other hand and one leg he could step on the coping and grasp the other sash.

This he proceeded to do and was presently standing in front of the adjoining window.

Then he raised the lower sash and stepped into the room, evidently occupied by one of the female servants.

Crossing to the door he found that it was not locked, and he walked out into the hall.

Unlocking the door of the room from which he had made his escape he went in, shut the window and latched it.

He returned to the hall and locked the door again.

"When those rascals return and find me gone they'll wonder how I made my escape," he chuckled. "Now to leave the house and notify the police."

He had reached the second floor when he heard somebody coming up the stairs.

Fearful that the person might be Gwin, he darted into the first room at hand.

It was a handsomely furnished apartment of moderate size.

On the table lay a hat he recognized as worn by the cashier.

On the floor, near the dressing-case, was Gwin's suitcase.

Evidently this was the room occupied by that individual.

Hardly had Bob noticed these things in the dim light of the waning day when he heard the cashier's voice in the corridor outside.

Instinctively the boy looked around for some place to hide.

There was a door at his elbow.

Bob pulled it open and found that it was, as he guessed, a closet.

He popped into it.

He was not a moment too soon.

Gwin opened the door and entered the room.

He turned on an electric bulb and the room was illuminated.

"This room will probably catch fire, too, for it's next to that occupied by the ladies," he muttered aloud, "so I'd better take my agreement with Gaston out of my bag and put it in my pocket with the check. Gaston is a rascal at heart, but he lacks nerve. Without me at his back he would have thrown up his hands and let the widow step into everything."

He opened his suitcase, took out the paper and read it over.

"This gives me a fine hold on Gaston. It shall make me a partner in his business one of these days. Ah, there's nothing like luck. I am Gaston's master, and I guess he realizes that I hold the whip hand of him. To-night I will make him sure of his million, and myself of \$50,000, then——"

He broke off as a knock came at the door.

Mechanically, he laid the agreement down on the table and went to the door.

Bob slipped out of the closet, grabbed the agreement and got back again.

A servant told the cashier that Mr. Gaston wanted to see

him before he started for the station to catch a train for New York.

"I will be down in a moment," replied Gwin, shutting the door.

He returned to the table, but to his surprise the paper was not on it.

He went through his pockets, yet could not find it.

"Where in thunder has it gone to?" he cried. "I had it in my hands a moment ago. Where the dickens could I have put it?"

He looked about on the floor and everywhere that he thought it might be, but, naturally, he did not find it.

And while he was thus engaged, Bob was watching him from the closet.

"It won't do for me to lose that," he muttered. "That would incriminate me as well as Gaston. I must find it."

At that moment the door opened and in walked the broker.

"What is detaining you here? Don't you know I've got to catch the 8.10 train, and I've barely time to make it with the auto?" said Gaston.

"I've mislaid an important paper and was looking for it," replied Gwin.

"You can hunt for it after I am gone."

"Well, what do you want to say?"

"I want you to send me a telegram, or 'phone me at my house the moment everything is accomplished. I shall be nervous till I hear from you. Somehow or another I feel as if there was going to be a slip in your arrangements."

Gwin laughed in a wicked way.

"Don't you worry, Gaston, there will be no slip."

"Have you been up to see the boy?"

"Not yet, but I'm going in a minute."

"You're going to drug him with chloroform, are you?"

"Yes, and saturate his clothes with the chemical, as well as the lounge on which I shall place him. No fear that he will ever bear witness against us."

"Be very careful that your movements are not noted by any of the servants."

"For them to babble about afterwards, eh? Trust me for that."

"Then, good night. I'm off."

The two rascals shook hands and the broker walked out of the room.

Bob was in hopes that Gwin would accompany him downstairs, but he didn't.

He was too anxious to find the agreement between him and his guilty partner.

He searched his pockets again, moved the table aside, and then stood considering, clearly nonplussed.

At that juncture the door of the closet creaked.

His sharp ears heard it, and after the episode in the library his suspicions were aroused.

He walked straight to the closet and threw the door open.

Bob stepped out and faced him, because he couldn't do anything else now that his presence in the room was disclosed.

"You—you here!" cried Gwin, fairly staggered. "How did you get out of——"

Bob saw that action, not words, was his cue.

He shot out his fist and caught the villain on the point of the jaw.

Gwin dropped to the floor, knocked out as clean as any prize-fighter ever was.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOB INTERVIEWS MRS. HENRY GASTON.

Bob looked down at the fallen man.

"Nothing could have happened better," he thought. "I will treat him to a dose of the same physic he handed out to me, and then the police shall attend to his case, and, afterward, to Mr. Gaston. There will be no catastrophe in this house to-night, thank heaven, and the lives of the two ladies, as well as my own, are saved."

There was a bunch of thin but strong cord in the closet.

Bob got it, turned the rascal over on his face, and after wrapping a piece of cloth around his wrists, to prevent the cord cutting his skin, he tied the man's wrists securely together.

Then he tied his ankles and gagged him with a towel.

Leaving the scoundrel on the floor, perfectly helpless, Bob left the room, locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"Now I shall call on Mrs. Gaston and explain the situation to her. It is a fortunate thing that I have the agreement Mr. Gaston signed, for she will hardly credit my story. The paper, however, will prove that the conspiracy against her is a fact, and that Gaston agreed to pay his cashier \$50,000 to put her and her daughter out of the way. Then the check will be found on him when the police search him. Better it should be, that's why I did not search his pockets for it. No doubt an investigation by the fire department of the room occupied by the ladies will show traces of the inflammable chemical which I heard Gwin say he had saturated it with. That will be proof positive of the contemplated crime, and then Gwin and Gaston will find themselves in a bad box."

Bob walked to the head of the stairs and then began to wonder which door led into the sitting-room.

While he was considering the matter a door facing him opened and a quietly dressed lady of perhaps forty came out.

She was dressed in black, and Bob was sure this was the widow of the late Henry Gaston, and the chief victim of the conspiracy.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, "are you Mrs. Henry Gaston?"

"I am," she replied.

"Can I speak to you on a matter of the greatest importance?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," she answered, in some surprise. "Step into the sitting-room."

"Your daughter is there, is she not?"

"She is."

"I think you had better come downstairs with me to the library as it might be better for her not to hear what I have to say."

The lady looked more surprised.

"May I ask your name?" she said.

"Robert Baker. I am employed as messenger in Mr. Gaston's office in Wall Street."

"You wish to see me privately?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well. I will go with you to the library, since you wish it."

Bob led the way, and helping Mrs. Gaston to a chair, seated himself opposite to her, after turning on the electric light.

"Madam, I'm afraid this interview is going to give you a shock, and that you will doubt the truth of the facts I am going to lay before you, but fortunately I am provided with the proofs to back it up," began Bob.

"You astonish me. Is this matter then so serious?"

"Serious, madam, I should say so. It could not be more serious. Until a few minutes ago, when I captured one of the rascals, you and your daughter were facing a terrible death."

Mrs. Gaston gasped and turned pale.

"Explain," she replied, in considerable agitation.

"That is what I'm about to do. To begin with, your appearance East as the acknowledged widow of Henry Gaston, who was supposed by all his friends as well as his brother to be a bachelor, has made a whole lot of difference to Philip Gaston, my employer, who, until he heard of your existence, naturally supposed that he was the heir to all his brother's property as well as the Wall Street business."

"I suppose so; but I do not intend that he shall suffer to the extent that the law allows. It is my intention to make him a present of the business in Wall Street which he now is in charge of. I think it is only right that he should have it. Indeed, I am surprised that my late husband made no such provision in his will."

"Have you told Mr. Gaston of your intentions?"

"No; I have left that to my lawyer."

"I thought he wasn't aware of your generous purpose. Well, madam, as I was saying, your coming on the scene, entirely unexpected, upset all of Mr. Gaston's calculations. Doubtless he believed he would be stripped of everything he had taken possession of, and naturally he didn't like it. So what does he do but take his cashier, Edward Gwin, who is a terrible scoundrel——"

"Mr. Gwin a scoundrel! Impossible!" exclaimed the widow. "He is in this house at this minute, a guest of Mr. Gaston's."

"I know he's here, and I repeat that he is a scoundrel of the first water, as you will admit when I have shown you the evidence proving him to be such."

"You amaze me."

"I shall amaze you more in a minute. I was about to say that Mr. Gaston, your brother-in-law, took this Gwin into his confidence and agreed to pay him the sum of \$50,000 if he would prevent you and your daughter from depriving him of the estate and business of his late brother."

"I cannot believe that Mr. Gaston would do such a thing. I have found him to be a perfect gentleman, and very solicitous for the comfort of myself and my child," said Mrs. Henry Gaston. "Why have you come to me with

such an outrageous story—you, an employee of his?" she added, indignantly.

"Madam, I expected you would receive my statement in this way, but fortunately I have something more substantial than mere words to convince you. Kindly read that paper. It is signed by Philip Gaston. I can guarantee that is his signature."

The lady took the paper and read it over.

Its contents bore out Bob's statement, but it seemed so outrageously improbable that Mrs. Gaston doubted its genuineness and said so.

"Well, I saw it in Mr. Gwin's hands not half an hour ago, and when he laid it down I took possession of it. The writing, with the exception of the signature, is in Gwin's handwriting, and it shall be proved in court."

"In court!" exclaimed the widow, with a startled look.

"Yes, madam. As soon as I have finished this interview I shall call the police to the house and give Mr. Gwin in custody. At present he is my prisoner."

"Your prisoner!"

Bob nodded.

"Permit me to go on," said the boy, taking the paper from the lady's hand. "This paper shows the existence of a conspiracy against you and your daughter. It shows that your brother-in-law stands ready to pay his cashier \$50,000—he has already given Mr. Gwin a check for \$25,000 in advance—if he can carry out its provisions. Mr. Gwin has made all his plans to do so, and had I not happened accidentally upon the scene, this evening would have been your last on earth, and your daughter would have met a like fate."

"Heavens, you cannot mean this?" cried the lady, her face going white.

"I do mean it. Before you retired to-night you were to be invited to take a glass of sherry. The wine was to be drugged. Within an hour you and your daughter would be wholly at Gwin's mercy. And what did he intend to do? It would not do to shed your blood. That would be dangerous. While you and your daughter were out driving with Mr. Gaston this morning, Gwin went into your room and soaked the apartment well with an inflammable chemical, which would cause it to burn like tinder. He went to the corner and put the fire-plug out of business, so as to make matters sure. At or about midnight he intended to get into your room somehow and set it on fire. In fifteen minutes you and your daughter would be in a sea of fire, and being drugged would give no sign. Your death would be absolutely certain, and the cause apparently an accident. Mr. Gaston would then be in no danger of losing his brother's fortune."

"My heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Henry Gaston, looking as if she was going to faint. "I cannot believe that Mr. Gwin would be guilty of such a horrible design," she added.

"You will believe it when an emissary of the fire department, whom I intend to send for, has made an investigation of your room and also of the hydrant."

The lady gasped.

"How did you come to learn all these facts?" she asked.

Bob explained how he had visited Elizabeth with one of the clerks of the office, and how, while taking a walk to

see Mr. Gaston's house, they had chased a thief, whom he (Bob) had followed into the grounds.

He then explained why he entered the library and hid in the closet.

"That was a most fortunate thing for you, madam, and your daughter," he went on. "It looks as if heaven sent me here to save your lives, and foil the dastardly purposes of your enemies."

He then told her how Mr. Gaston and his cashier came into the library, and how, concealed in the closet, he had overheard all their plans.

Then he told her how they discovered his presence, how Gwin knocked him out, how he was taken upstairs, bound and gagged and locked in a room on the third floor.

"Gwin intended that I should perish with you, for I was a dangerous witness, but fortunately I made my escape a short time before Mr. Gaston left the house to take the train for New York. I took refuge in Gwin's room by accident, and while there I secured that paper, incriminating him and Mr. Gaston, and in the end I got the better of him, and he now lies gagged and bound, himself, in his room, waiting to be handed over to the police."

Bob's story was so straightforward, and his manner so earnest, that Mrs. Gaston began to credit its truth in spite of her disinclination to connect either her brother-in-law or Mr. Gwin with so infamous a project.

"Now you know everything, madam, so I will take the liberty of using this telephone on the desk to communicate with the police," said Bob, rising.

"If what you have told me is really true, and it seems to bear the impress of fact, my daughter and I owe our lives to you," said the lady.

"You do, next to heaven! As surely as the sun will rise to-morrow you both would have been destroyed this night if I hadn't come on the scene."

"Then you may be sure that I shall not forget the debt of gratitude I owe you. It is terrible to think that my dead husband's brother could be guilty of such treachery to me, who meant to do the right thing by him."

"When he learns the truth he will curse the day he called his cashier in to help him. Of the two, Gwin is ten times the worst. I am sure Mr. Gaston never would have conceived, much less have carried out, such a fiendish scheme as the cashier was about to put into execution to gain \$50,000."

The telephone book lay on the top of the desk, and Bob looked into it for the number of the police headquarters.

When he found it he asked to be connected.

Over the wire he told the man at the other end the bare particulars of the projected incendiary purpose of Cashier Gwin, which he had blocked. He asked that officers be sent to take charge of the prisoner, and that the Fire Department be asked to send an expert to secure evidence.

He was promised both.

Mrs. Henry Gaston remained in the room while he used the wire.

She was much depressed by the exposure she had listened to.

When Bob hung up the receiver she asked him if he would send a message for her to her lawyer.

"Certainly, madam. I am entirely at your service," he answered.

"His name is George Gardner, and he lives with his mother at the Endicott Hotel in Eighth avenue. You can connect direct with the house by telephone. Tell him that I wish him to come out here at once without fail. Assure him that it is urgent. I will now return to my daughter, who doubtless is wondering where I have gone, and what is keeping me. After you get through, come up to the sitting-room. It faces the staircase. I will introduce you to my daughter. By that time she will know the great obligation we are both under to you."

Bob bowed and the lady left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JAILING OF GASTON AND GWIN.

Bob immediately called up Central again and asked to be connected with the Endicott Hotel, of New York City, over the long-distance wire.

"It may take ten or fifteen minutes," replied the operator. "Hang up and I will ring you up when the connection has been made."

"All right," replied Bob.

He sat down to wait and to think over what he had gone through since he entered the house some hours before.

"Tom doubtless came to the conclusion that the thief led me a long chase when I did not rejoin him, and he went back to his sister's home, trusting I would find my way there. When I didn't turn up in a reasonable time he doubtless returned to the city alone, concluding that as I was a stranger in Elizabeth I couldn't find his sister's house, and went back to New York on my own hook. Tom will get the surprise of his life when he sees the facts in the papers. And perhaps Wall Street won't be surprised to discover what a rascal Broker Gaston has developed into. Well, this world is full of surprises, pleasant and otherwise."

Ting-a-ling-ling! rang out the telephone.

Bob grabbed the receiver.

"Hello, is this the Endicott Hotel?"

"Yes."

"Is Mr. George Gardner in? I wish to speak to him on a matter of urgent necessity."

"Hold the wire and I will see," came the reply.

In a few minutes a man's voice asked who was on the wire.

"Are you Mr. Gardner?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"This is Mr. Gaston's residence in Elizabeth."

"Ah, indeed! Does Mrs. Gaston wish to talk with me?"

"She wishes you to come right out here without delay."

"She does?"

"Yes. A matter of grave importance has happened and she must see you."

"All right. I'll come out if I can get a train."

"Come by trolley if you can't get here any other way."

"It must be something serious."

"It is very serious, I assure you."

"Tell Mrs. Gaston I will come without fail."

"All right. Good-by."

Bob hung up the receiver and left the library.

Two minutes later he was in the sitting-room, being introduced to a remarkable pretty girl of seventeen, whose name was Edna Gaston.

She looked nervous and distressed, like her mother, who had been telling her what she had learned from Bob.

"Mamma says you saved our lives, and so I hope you will understand that we are very, very grateful to you and that we never will forget it," said the girl.

"That's all right, Miss Gaston. It's a satisfaction to me to know that I have been of service to you," replied Bob, much impressed by her many personal attractions.

At that moment a servant came to the door.

"If you please, mum, there are men at the door, asking for Mr. Baker," she said.

"I'll go down and see them," said Bob.

He went downstairs and asked the men in.

"I discovered a conspiracy on the part of two rascals, one of whom is a prisoner in his room upstairs, to set fire to this house. The fire-plug on the corner has been tampered with in some way, and the room occupied by the lady of the house and her daughter has been sprinkled with some kind of an inflammable chemical to make it burn quickly and give the blaze a good start. Are you from the fire department?" he asked the man in plain clothes.

The stranger said he was.

"Well, I want you to inspect the room thoroughly to secure evidence against the rascal who is a prisoner. Follow me," said Bob.

The three men accompanied him to the floor above.

"Mrs. Gaston, will you show this man your room so he can look it over?" said Bob, opening the sitting-room door.

The widow came out and led the way to the apartment occupied by herself and her daughter.

Bob and the three men entered it.

The electric light was turned on and the inspection commenced.

Evidence of the projected crime was soon forthcoming.

"This room has been converted into a regular fire-trap," said the inspector from the fire department.

"I will take you to Mrs. Gaston and you will state the facts to her," said Bob.

The lady was soon convinced, if she hadn't been before, that she and her daughter had had a very narrow escape.

"I will now give the rascal I caught into your custody," said Bob to the policeman. "His name is Edward Gwin, and he is cashier for Philip Gaston, this lady's brother-in-law, a New York broker."

He took the officers to Gwin's room and the man was found sitting on his bed with his legs free, making desperate efforts to release his bound wrists.

He sprang up when the officers were let in by Bob and glared at all hands.

"There is your prisoner," said the boy, "take charge of him."

"Arrest me!" roared the cashier. "What for?"

"Attempted arson," said Bob.

"You must be crazy to charge me with such a crime. This is some put-up job. I charge that boy with assault, officers. I request that Mrs. Gaston be sent for."

"Mrs. Gaston knows all about your attempt on her life and that of her daughter. She has no wish to see you," replied Bob.

One of the officers cut Gwin's wrists free.

He was then told that he was under arrest and must accompany them to the police station.

"This is a most ridiculous accusation. I am the friend of Mr. Gaston, the stock broker of Wall Street, and cashier of his office," said Gwin.

"You will have the opportunity to defend yourself before the magistrate in the morning," said one of the policemen.

Gwin found that he had to go, and Bob went with the party to make the charge in due form.

He had an interview with the deputy chief, to whom he told his story, and showed the agreement signed by the broker.

The officer decided that Gaston must be arrested at once, and telephoned a request to the New York authorities to take the necessary action.

Half an hour later the broker was arrested at his home, to his great consternation.

He was taken to police headquarters, where he was questioned, but declined to make any statement.

He was then sent to the Tombs and locked up.

Bob returned to the house in Elizabeth, as Mrs. Gaston wanted him to meet her lawyer and tell him his story.

The lawyer was there when he arrived.

Mr. Gardner was amazed at the turn events had taken.

Bob's story was too well substantiated now to admit of any doubt.

When Lawyer Gardner read over the agreement the broker had signed he declared the man was a scoundrel, and that he must be punished with his accomplice.

Mrs. Gaston appeared reluctant to push the case against her brother-in-law, but her lawyer asserted that Gwin could not be dealt with without incriminating his employer, and that the law must be allowed to take its course.

As it was quite late when the conference ended, both Gardner and Bob were invited to remain all night, and they accepted.

Next morning they appeared in the magistrate's court, which was held on Sunday to dispose of arrests made the afternoon and night before.

Gwin was held under heavy bail for the action of the Grand Jury, and Gaston was also held in New York at the request of the Jersey City authorities.

Bob and Lawyer Gardner then started for New York together.

"I'm afraid the office will be on the fritz to-morrow with the cashier and boss both in jail," said the boy.

"I shall file the will of Henry Gaston in the morning at the Surrogate's Court, and secure an order to take charge of the business on behalf of the testator's widow," said the lawyer. "I will then secure a competent manager to run it."

"The story will be in all the papers in the morning, and all Wall Street will read the facts. It will mark the finish of Philip Gaston in the Street."

"He deserves all that's coming to him. I never heard of such a terrible piece of rascality in my life. That man Gwin seems to have got murder down to a fine art. It makes my blood run cold when I think of the fate he designed for Mrs. Gaston and her daughter. Young man, you have done a fine thing for yourself in saving the life of my client. She'll see that you are suitably rewarded."

"I don't want any reward, Mr. Gardner. I should refuse it if it was offered to me. I have done nothing more than was my duty, and I don't take pay for that."

"Mrs. Gaston won't offer you pay, but she'll be a good friend to you henceforth. A real friend is an excellent thing to have in this world."

"I shall be glad to accept her friendship," said Bob, thinking about the fair Edna, "and she may command my services at any time."

He and the lawyer soon after parted, and Bob reached his boarding house in time for dinner.

When he came down to breakfast next morning he made a grab for the paper.

On the front page was the story of the Gaston conspiracy in which his own name figured prominently as the person who had exposed it and saved the two victims from their fate.

He reached the office first, as usual, and shortly afterward Tom Brush came in.

"Suffering jewsharps, Bob, what in creation is this story in the paper about Gwin, the boss, yourself and a lady and her daughter who claim to be the widow and child of Henry Gaston? I'm so astonished that I really am up in the air," said Tom.

"The story is true, Tom. You've seen the last of Philip Gaston and Edward Gwin in this office. They are now in the hands of the law and will have to answer for their contemplated crime. You never did a better thing in your life than take me to Elizabeth on Saturday afternoon. You were the unconscious means of saving the lives of an estimable lady and a very charming girl," said Bob.

"I was!"

"You were. If you hadn't taken me over to Jersey I wouldn't have been in the position to block the boss's villainous scheme."

"Tell me how you happened to get on to it? Where did you chase that thief to after I lost sight of you? Did you catch him?"

"I did not. He got away in some slick manner after I had chased him up to the Gaston house."

Bob then started to tell Tom his story in detail, and while he was doing so two other clerks came in.

They had read the morning paper, too, and were just as paralyzed as was Tom.

They were amazed to learn that the late Henry Gaston had been a benedict on the quiet, and particularly were they astonished to see the new messenger's name connected with the story of the crime engineered by Mr. Gaston and his cashier.

They crowded around Bob and listened to what he was telling Brush.

The rest of the clerks entered and they, too, gathered around the hero of the newspaper account.

When he finished they bombarded him with numerous questions.

No one thought of going to his desk, for as the cashier would not be on hand the big safe could not be opened to get at the books and papers, consequently there would be no work done until somebody came who was able to open things up.

Pretty soon broker acquaintances of Mr. Gaston, who had read the story in great wonder, began dropping in to find out further particulars.

Bob was the only person who could satisfy their curiosity, and he held quite a levee in the private room for an hour or more.

Hardly anything else was talked about at the Exchange, in the offices and on the street that morning but Mr. Gaston's conspiracy to do away with the unexpected widow and daughter of the late Henry Gaston.

Bob Baker acquired something of a reputation in Wall Street, and was generally regarded as quite a plucky lad.

He had little time to think about his deal in A. & C., but about noon he took a look at the ticker and saw that the stock had gone up a point.

The clerks had a lazy time of it up to their lunch hour when they all went out in a bunch.

Bob remained, and while they were gone Lawyer Gardner came in.

He had an interview with the boy, the result of which was his departure for the Tombs prison to see Mr. Gaston.

That gentleman was being held without bail to await the action of the New Jersey authorities.

He furnished the lawyer with the combination of both safes, the key to his private one and a duplicate key to the big one.

Gardner then returned to the office and set the clerks at work, putting the second bookkeeper in charge as cashier for the present, with the probability of his holding the job right along.

Business then went on as before, and Bob got something to do.

When the Exchange closed for the day, A. & C. was up another half point.

Bob was satisfied that his lucky nickel was pointing the way to the \$50,000, and he went to his boarding place, feeling uncommonly good.

CHAPTER X.

BOB MAKES TWO HAULS IN THE MARKET.

When he came downstairs to dinner he discovered that he was an object of great interest to the boarders.

They all knew that he was Philip Gaston's messenger, and the story in the paper had enlightened them as to what had occurred in Elizabeth on Saturday evening, and the part he had played in the affair.

By degrees they began to question him about the matter. He had little to say, referring them to the newspaper account as containing all the important particulars.

He said that as an employee of the office he did not care to discuss the case at all.

Next morning business went on at the office as usual.

Mr. Gaston, after a consultation with his lawyer, agreed to waive any opposition to appearing voluntarily in Elizabeth, so a detective took him to the town and delivered him to the police there.

He was brought before the magistrate and Bob was taken to Elizabeth by Mr. Gardner, to appear against him.

He was released on a heavy bond, which he succeeded in procuring, and during the afternoon he got bail for his cashier.

That evening Gardner held a conference with the recreant broker, and an arrangement was made by which Mr. Gaston was allowed a reasonable time to vacate the house on East Seventy-second street.

Mrs. Henry Gaston voluntarily agreed to allow him an annuity out of the estate, and would not have prosecuted him if she could have avoided doing so.

That matter was out of her hands, so the chances were the annuity would do the broker very little good for several years to come, as he would certainly be convicted when brought to trial with Gwin.

During that week A. & C. advanced to 94, and began to attract some attention.

On Monday morning it opened at 95 and then went up to 97 by noon.

Bob met Will Sparks in front of the Exchange about that hour.

"I told you my tip was a winner," said Will. "It will soon be up to par."

"Shall I sell out, then?" asked Bob.

"I wouldn't be in a hurry. Keep your eyes on it. Wait till the boom is well on and then get out."

"When will that be?"

"Most likely by to-morrow. The morning papers prophesy that the stock will go several points above par. I think from the present outlook it will be safe to hold on till it gets to 105. The trouble is that you never can tell what's going to happen in Wall Street. When things look brightest the clouds may be gathering behind, and before you know it the storm is on with a swoop that takes your breath away. The only point I can tell you is not to wait for the last dollar."

"What do you mean by the last dollar?"

"Don't hold on too long in hope of making all that you think is in sight."

"In other words, it's dangerous to be hoggish."

"That's it. If a person could only tell the proper moment to sell out he could nearly always make money out of his deals."

"If" is a little word, but it means a whole lot, doesn't it?" laughed Bob.

"Bet your life!" replied Will, who then said he had to be getting back to his office.

A. & C. closed at 99 that afternoon, and Bob figured that he was \$650 ahead.

"If it goes to 105 and I sell out at that price I'll make nearly a thousand dollars," he told himself, "and Will will get nearly double what he expected."

Next morning, soon after the Exchange opened, A. & C. took a bound upward and went to 106 in no time at all.

When Bob went to the board room with a message to the broker who was now attending to the business of the house, he saw the price on the blackboard.

He also saw that there was great excitement around the pole of the stock.

"I guess this is the time for me to sell," he thought, "and I'd better do it before I return to the office."

While he stood waiting for the broker to come up to the rail, the price advanced rapidly to 107.

When he left the Exchange it was up to 107 1-4.

He hustled up to the little bank and told the margin clerk to close out his deal.

"It will be done at once," said the clerk, shoving a paper toward him to sign.

When he got back to the office he heard one of the customers, who held the tape in his fingers, say that A. & C. was up to 107 3-4.

His stock was sold at 107 5-8, as he found out next day, and his profit footed up \$1,055.

When he collected his money he turned over \$105 to Will Sparks as his share of the transaction.

That left him \$950 ahead, which, added to the money he had found, raised his capital to a little over \$1,500.

A day or two afterward he received a note from Mrs. Henry Gaston, inviting him to spend Saturday afternoon and Sunday with herself and daughter.

He accepted the invitation with pleasure, invested in a new suit and other fixings for the occasion and went over.

The automobile met him at the station and he rode out in style.

He received a warm welcome from the young lady and her mother, and then he and Edna Gaston took a ride around the country in the auto, returning shortly before dinner was announced.

Next day he and the young lady spent most of their time in each other's company and appeared to be quite taken with one another.

He received an invitation to come out on the following Saturday, and he promised to do so.

During the following week, Mr. Gaston removed his personal belongings to a bachelor apartment house not far from the one he had been living in at the time his brother died.

On the following day he rendered a partial accounting of the estate while it had been in his possession.

He completed this accounting the succeeding week, and the figures showed that he was indebted to the estate several thousand dollars.

He might have covered this up in one way or another, as Gwin advised him to do, but he didn't seem to care since he knew he was facing a long term in the State Prison at Trenton, because conviction seemed certain.

Gwin, on his part, didn't intend to stand trial if he could help it.

His purpose was to jump his bail a few days before the trial and light out to parts unknown.

He wasn't confiding his intentions to Gaston, because the broker, having got bail for him, would certainly put up a strenuous objection.

Before leaving the city he hoped to be able to get square

with Bob, whom he regarded as the person wholly responsible for the failure of their project.

After Mr. Gaston's evacuation of the Sixty-second street house it was put in the hands of painters and decorators to brighten up, though it did not need a great deal in that line.

In about two weeks it was ready for occupancy again, and then Mrs. Gaston and her daughter, and the servants at the country place, moved in.

They had no furniture to bring with them as all the furniture and fittings of the house remained there.

They had never been used to such grand surroundings, but being nice, sensible people they assumed no airs in consequence, but settled down to enjoy life in their improved situation.

The only real friends they could count on at the start were Lawyer Gardner and Bob Baker.

Of course, with wealth at their disposal they would soon have all the friends they desired, though it didn't follow that these new acquisitions would all be the real article.

It was about this time that Bob, who was picking up Wall Street ways at a rapid rate, discovered that a syndicate had been formed to corner and boom N. & R. shares.

The stock was then ruling at 72, which was low, and on looking up its general record he found that it usually sold between 75 and 80.

Accordingly, he thought this was a good chance for him to add to his capital.

He went around to the little bank and bought 150 shares of the stock, putting up a marginal advance of \$1,500.

When he met Will Sparks he put him on to the stock, and Will bought ten shares on the strength of Bob's statements.

At the end of the following week N. & R., which had slowly advanced to 76, took a sudden jump to 80.

The brokers began to get busy with it, buying and selling on close margins.

The lambs began to nibble, too, and the price continued to go up an eighth at a time, with increasing operations.

Next day it became the main point of interest at the Exchange, a crowd hovering around the standard during business hours, and it advanced to 85.

Bob consulted with Will as to whether he had better sell then or not.

"It will stand me in a profit of nearly \$2,000 if I sell now," he said.

"I'm going to hold on for 90," said Will. "I think it's safe to go to that."

So Bob didn't sell that day, and next morning the stock opened at 85 1-2.

When he paid his first visit to the Exchange it was up to 86 1-2.

It looked as if it was going to 90.

As Bob stood on the curb waiting for an auto to get out of the way, two traders walked slowly behind him, talking.

"You'd better sell your N. & R., Jones; it looks shaky to me. I've just got out from under. I wouldn't be surprised to see it slump at any minute," said one.

That's all Bob heard, but it changed his mind about crossing Broad street.

Instead, he started up Broad, crossed Wall Street into Nassau and went into the little bank.

He ordered his deal closed out immediately.

Twenty minutes later, while Bob was sitting in the office, the market took on a sudden slump and prices generally collapsed.

N. & R. suffered more than the rest.

It dropped to 76, and lots of the bears went home broke that day.

When he got through for the day Bob ran up to the little bank to find out how he had fared.

He found Will at the window, ordering his shares sold in the morning.

"Hello, Bob! So you're caught, too, eh?" he said.

"I hope not."

"Hope not? Why, the stock is down to 76."

"Suppose it is. I bought it at 72, so I can't lose, anyway."

"I bought my ten shares at 74, so I may win \$25, but if I'd sold out in time I'd have made at least \$125. Hard luck, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"You have 150 shares and ought to make over \$500 if the price doesn't break when the market opens."

"I've got nothing to do with the market in the morning. I gave my order to sell about twenty minutes before the slump, and I've come around to see if my stock was sold at the then ruling figure," said Bob.

"The dickens you say!" cried Will. "If you sold out before the slump you're all to the good. How came you to do it?"

"Thought the stock looked shaky when I was last at the Exchange, so I hastened to get out from under, notwithstanding what you said about the probability of it going to 90. You see, it didn't go to that figure."

"You're a lucky boy," said Will, enviously.

"You can blame my luck on that nickel. I believe it will make \$50,000 for me yet, just as I dreamed."

"It is likely to if luck continues to break your way."

Bob then spoke to the margin clerk and ascertained that his shares had been sold at the top of the market and that he had made over \$2,100.

"How much will you be worth when you cash in?" asked Will as they walked out of the little bank.

"How much? About \$3,700."

"You're going some since you came to Wall Street."

"Yes, I'm doing pretty well."

"You've done one thing that no other messenger can boast."

"What's that?"

"Put your boss out of business," laughed Will.

"No, he put himself out of business. I merely spoiled his scheme."

Then Bob said good-by, and jumped on a Broadway car.

and arson, and the district attorney of Union County proceeded to set a day for their trial.

Their lawyers were notified to deliver the men in the criminal court at the town of Elizabeth on a certain date, and the lawyers in turn communicated with the men.

On the afternoon of the day they got the news that the day of their trial was close at hand, Gaston and Gwin sat together in the sitting-room of the former's apartments in Park avenue, New York.

Neither was in a cheerful frame of mind, although the sun was shining brightly in at the windows and the air was soft and balmy as befitted a fine September day.

"Well," said Gwin, "are we going to stand trial, which means sure conviction and a long prison term, or are we going to jump our bail and disappear from our customary haunts for good?"

"If I had the money to make good my bail bond, for I still have a sense of honor, I'd step out and let the police try and find me," replied the ex-broker.

"In my opinion, charity begins at home. We are bound to protect ourselves even if our friends are the losers thereby. What's \$10,000 any way to the parties who went on our bonds? They can better afford to lose the money than we can afford to go to prison."

Gaston said nothing, but gazed moodily at the pattern of the rug.

"It's tough for a gentleman like me to have to don prison stripes—to become a jail-bird," he said, after a pause.

"Then why submit to it? Look here, Gaston, we're both pretty well strapped, but I think I see a way of replenishing our funds," said Gwin.

"How?" asked his companion.

"I haven't been asleep since we failed to accomplish that little job at your late brother's country home. I won't call it your country place, for as matters have turned out it never really belonged to you."

"Well?" said the ex-broker, impatiently.

"I learned to-day, how it doesn't matter, that your estimable sister-in-law received through her lawyer a considerable sum of money at her house. This money is doubtless locked up in the wall safe at this moment, with other valuables that could be converted into money. When you turned the house over to the lawyer you gave him the key and the combination of that safe, but one day you incidentally told me that there was a duplicate key in your possession which you forgot to hand over. You doubtless have that key yet. Now if the combination hasn't been changed that key will prove an open sesame to us to-night, if you have the courage to embark in the enterprise I have planned."

"You propose to commit a burglary, then, of my late residence?"

"I do, and I have engaged two men, experts at the business, to help us put the game through successfully," said the ex-cashier.

"I see your drift. Your idea is to secure funds enough to enable us to square ourselves with our bondsmen and to provide us with money to leave for parts unknown?"

Gwin nodded, although he, on his part, did not intend to make good the amount of his bail bond.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BURGLARY.

The Grand Jury returned an indictment charging Philip Gaston and Edward Gwin with attempted murder

He was a thorough unprincipled rascal, and it was the unluckiest day of his life that Gaston took up with him.

"Mrs. Gaston and her daughter are going out of town after dinner to be gone over night, and Bob Baker is to sleep at the house as a kind of protector," said the rascal. "We need not fear him, though he did do us up by accident. It may afford us the chance to get back at him. It would give me a lot of satisfaction to sew his mouth up, for I hate him most heartily."

"No, no," objected Gaston; "if I go in with you in this scheme there must be no murder. We are already deep enough in the mire. I don't care to run any chance of the electric chair."

"Well, we won't discuss that. We want money more than we want revenge."

"Who are these men you have engaged to help us?"

"High tobers of the first water. They will share one-third of the swag between them. One of them is a safe expert. He will bring his tools to use in case the combination has been changed."

The two men talked for some time over the projected job and then went out to an early dinner.

That day Bob received a tip that a certain stock, called D. & L., was going to be boomed shortly.

He knew he could rely on the information, so he bought 300 shares of it at the ruling figure of 80.

He put his deal through after leaving the office for the day, and then he took an elevated train uptown on the Third avenue road.

He got off at Fifty-ninth street station and walked over to the residence of Mrs. Henry Gaston, where he had been invited to a quiet dinner.

He expected to stay there all night, as the lady and her daughter were going to Brooklyn to visit a new friend, and would not return till the following morning.

Bob found Edna waiting for him, and they enjoyed a pleasant chat before they were called downstairs to dinner.

"You mustn't let any one run away with the house while we are away," smiled the girl at the table.

"I will try not to. I think you will find it here when you get back. Don't leave any of your diamonds around loose, for the temptation might be too great for me to resist."

"We haven't many diamonds or other precious stones yet, but those we have we shall carry with us. However, there is \$10,000 locked up in our wall safe, together with some securities of no great value. Mother has the combination and the key. She might let you have both if you ask her."

"Thank you, I would prefer not to be burdened with the responsibility," laughed Bob. "There are lots of valuable things in the house that would offer a fine haul for an accomplished housebreaker. I presume it is to protect them that you have asked me to sleep here to-night?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gaston, "that is the reason we have asked you to stay here. The servants sleep at the top of the house, and if thieves broke in they would have a clear field below. You will, therefore, sleep in my room on the second floor, as a protection to the lower part of the house."

"It gives me great pleasure to be of service to you, Mrs. Gaston."

"We appreciate your kindness greatly and shall not forget it."

Dinner over, the ladies got ready to go.

At eight o'clock a cab came to the door and they departed in it, leaving Bob to amuse himself among the books in the library till he got ready to go to bed.

He found a book that interested him greatly and he read for a long time.

The servants went upstairs to bed and the house became silent.

The street was a quiet one, and the noise of the surface cars on Madison avenue did not reach as far as the house.

Bob was used to some noise at night, for his boarding place was near enough to Sixth avenue for him to hear the rumble of the elevated trains when they passed.

The silence of the house and neighborhood presently had a somnolent effect on his nerves, so that before he suspected its effect on him he nodded over his book and ere long fell asleep in his chair, with the electric light at his side.

He had been asleep for a couple of hours when he awoke with a start.

He looked at the gilt clock in one corner and saw that it was nearly one.

"I've been asleep, that's clear," he muttered, "and have been wasting the electricity. It's high time I turned in."

He turned off the light and started for his bedroom.

As he stepped out into the hall he heard a noise in the sitting-room.

It was so suspicious that he opened the door and looked in.

Three men were there before the safe, two wearing derby hats and the other a silk tile.

The latter he recognized as Philip Gaston.

Then he identified one of the others as Edward Gwin.

The third was a stranger to him.

The presence of these three in the house staggered him, for they had no right there and their purpose could not be honest.

"They are going to make an attempt on the safe," he thought. "While they are engaged I'll return to the library and telephone the police."

He was about to shut the door and start for the library when he was suddenly seized from behind and pushed into the room by a smooth-faced young man with a cap.

The three men turned at the sound and beheld Bob struggling in the grasp of the man they had left outside on the watch.

Gwin jumped forward and grabbed Bob.

"Gag and bind this chap, quick!" he said.

The other man in the derby joined in the struggle, and in a few minutes Bob was helpless, with his arms secured behind him and a towel tied around his mouth.

"So, young man, you woke up and heard us, eh?" said Gwin, in a vicious tone. "So much the worse for you! Gaston and I owe you a debt that maybe I'll pay before we leave the house. Let him lie on the floor till we get through. Not in here, but outside in the hall, and you stay and watch him, Burke," to the chap with the cap.

It didn't take the men long to get into the safe, for the

combination had not been changed, and Gaston had the key to it.

Gwin took a tin box out of the safe, and as there was nothing else of any value in it they shut the door and re-locked it.

"The boy has recognized us, Gaston," said the ex-cashier. "We ought to pickle him so he can't give us away."

"There is only one way of silencing him effectually, and I object to that," replied the ex-broker.

"There is another way. We'll take him away with us in the cab and make a prisoner of him. Then he won't be able to inform on us until after we have left the city."

"Where shall we take him?" asked Gaston.

"I'll attend to that. Come on."

He laid his hand on the door and was astonished to find it locked.

"What's the meaning of this?" snorted the ex-cashier, angrily. "Burke wouldn't have locked us in."

Gaston tried the door himself and saw that it was fastened.

"I don't understand this," he said.

"Here, Billings, you've got tools that'll open that door," said Gwin to the other man. "Get busy."

Billings proceeded to get busy at the door with a small pick.

He was an expert at such things, and he soon pushed the key out of the lock and then took a skeleton key and unlocked it in a jiffy.

He pulled the door open and as the three rascals started to walk out they found their way obstructed by a pointed revolver in the hand of Bob Baker, the lad they supposed was their prisoner under the eye of Burke.

CHAPTER XII.

CAUGHT OFF HIS GUARD.

The reader will naturally wonder how Bob, who had been tied and gagged and left outside the door in charge of Burke, got free and was in a position to turn the tables on the rascals.

It happened this way:

One of the female servants upstairs had been unable to get to sleep, owing to a headache.

At the moment of Bob's capture she got up to look for a bottle of stuff she used to alleviate her trouble.

Not finding it on her table she recollected she had left it down in the kitchen.

She started down to get it, and Burke heard her steps on the stairs.

He immediately started up to waylay and secure her from giving the alarm.

The moment he left Bob the boy began tugging at his bonds, and as they had not been well tied he was free inside of a couple of minutes.

Then he tore the towel from his mouth.

The first thing he did was to lock the sitting-room door.

Taking off his shoes, and carrying the cord and the towel, he followed Burke upstairs and found him struggling in the dark with the stout cook.

He took a hand in the scrimmage and pulled the rascal off the woman.

"Now, Mary, tie him while I hold him," he said.

The cook, who was a pugnacious Irish woman, lost no time in doing what the boy told her, and when she had his arms tied Bob gagged him.

"Now stand guard over him," said the young messenger. "There are three more downstairs whom I have locked in the sitting-room."

"Three more, is it?" gasped the cook.

"Yes, but don't be alarmed. I'm going to telephone the police, and we'll have them behind the bars in a short time."

Bob ran downstairs and rushing into the library turned on the electric light and was soon in communication with the nearest police station-house, over the 'phone, but he took care to muffle the bell when using it.

He told the officer at the other end of the wire that there were four burglars in the house.

"I've captured one, and got the other three locked in a room. You must send policemen in a hurry or they'll be able to get out by way of the front windows on the street, though it's rather a dangerous route, but men will take chances to avoid arrest."

He was promised immediate assistance.

As he started to turn off the light his eyes lighted on a revolver lying on the top end of one of the low bookcases.

He grabbed it and started for the sitting-room to head off the rascals if they tried to break their way through.

So when they came out, as we have seen, he had them all covered with the weapon.

The three men started back in consternation, and Gwin uttered an imprecation.

"Throw up your hands!" cried Bob. "Your side-partner is a prisoner and the police are outside and will be here in a few minutes."

Gwin was a man of quick expedient.

He snatched off his hat and flung it in Bob's face.

As Bob started back the three rushed upon him, throwing him down.

He fired his revolver at random, but did not hit one of them.

In the helter-skelter rush, Gwin dropped the box, and as he stopped to get it he was pushed ahead by Gaston, and he had to leave it behind.

The three ran downstairs and made their escape by the street door.

Bob followed them as quickly as he could, and fired at one of their retreating figures without result.

When the police arrived he had to report that three of the rascals had got away, and led the officers upstairs to where the cook was watching Burke.

That crook was marched off to the station.

The excitement had cured the cook's headache, and after Bob had explained matters to her she returned to her room.

Bob, after locking the front door, and seeing that the basement door, which had been forced, was secured, went to bed himself.

Next morning after breakfast he took the tin box with him to the office, leaving word with the cook to tell Mrs. Gaston to call him up on the 'phone when she got back to the house.

He was not called to the 'phone until nearly three o'clock.

Mrs. Gaston had just reached home and learned the facts from the cook.

After quite a conversation, Bob told her he would fetch the box up with him in an hour.

As he was leaving the office with the box in his hand a messenger stepped up and handed him a note.

Apparently it came from Lawyer Gardner, requesting Bob to meet him at the office of a friend of his on the top floor of a Broadway office building at once, on business of great importance.

Bob was somewhat surprised at the request, but started to call on the lawyer.

He found the number easily enough and started upstairs in the elevator.

A man, who had followed him from Wall Street, stepped in with him.

Both got out at the top floor.

Bob began looking for the name of the person who occupied the office where the supposed Gardner was waiting for him.

As he turned around three men suddenly jumped out on him from under the roof stairs, knocked him down, and before he knew what was wrong he was bound and gagged.

He was able, however, to recognize two of the men as Gaston and Gwin.

"Up with him on the roof," said Gwin, as the man who had come up the elevator with Bob joined them.

One of the chaps, who wore a cap, ran up the stairs, unbolted the scuttle and stepped out on the roof.

Gwin and the other stranger carried Bob up, while Gaston followed with the box.

"Carry him over to the last building of the row," said Gaston.

The man with the cap took Gwin's place, and the ex-cashier took the box from Gaston.

The man who had come up the elevator tried the scuttle and found it locked.

He pulled out a jimmy and in a couple of minutes forced it open.

"Take him down and stow him away in the little closet behind the ladder," ordered Gaston, pointing to the prisoner.

Bob was taken down the ladder and disposed of as the ex-broker had directed.

The door was shut on him and the button turned, then the two men rejoined Gwin and Gaston on the roof.

The former had discovered the \$10,000 in money in the box, shoved it into his pocket, and when their confederates returned he said, with a wink at Gaston:

"We've had our trouble for nothing. There was nothing in the box but these securities, which are not worth their salt."

The confederates looked at each other in disappointment, and followed the two Wall Street men back to the scuttle up which they had originally reached the roof.

In the meantime, Bob found himself in a pretty bad predicament, but he did not lose courage because fate was against him.

Remembering how easily he had escaped from his bonds the night before, he started to repeat the operation, and succeeded in freeing himself in five minutes.

He rushed up to the scuttle, threw it open and looked out, but saw no sign of the rascals on the roof.

He ran downstairs as quickly as he could, but he missed the rascals in the crowd of pedestrians on Broadway.

He looked around for some moments, then ran into a drug store and notified the police by telephone of the occurrence.

There was nothing for him to do now but go uptown and tell Mrs. Gaston what had happened to him and her box of money.

When he reached the Gaston home and made a full explanation to the lady and her daughter, they did not blame him.

Bob was invited to stay to supper, and he did, after which he spent the evening in Edna's society.

CHAPTER XIII.

BOB'S REMARKABLE LUCK IN A STOCK.

During the ensuing week nothing was heard of either Gaston or Gwin.

They failed to appear when their trial came on, and a bench warrant was issued for their arrest.

Their bail also was forfeited, to the great disgust of the bondsmen, who declared that never again would they be responsible for another man.

Bob devoted his attention to business, but he did not forget to keep a close watch on his new deal.

The stock went up by slow degrees, and on Saturday closed at 83.

On Monday following it began to attract attention at the opening of the Exchange, and that day it jumped to 90.

Next day it went to par, amid great excitement in the board room, and Bob sold out at 101 3-8, making a profit of \$6,300, and making him worth \$10,000.

"Well, I've got one-fifth of my \$50,000," he told Will Sparks, "and I haven't been so very long in getting it, either."

A month passed away and then Bob caught on to another tip.

The market had been in bad shape for a couple of weeks and nobody was buying anything to speak of.

The gilt-edged stocks were holding their own, and were about the only shares dealt in.

The stock that received the least consideration was X. & Z.

It had been in the dumps for a year or more, and was down to 40.

It might have gone lower if the bears had taken the trouble to raid it, but it didn't seem worth their while.

In fact, nobody paid any attention to it nowadays.

Speculators naturally only care to handle shares that have some life in them.

One morning Bob was in a certain office and he heard a big operator tell the broker to go ahead and buy all the X. & Z. he could get.

"That must mean something," thought the boly. "I'm going to keep my eye on that stock."

Later in the day he met a broker he was on good terms with.

"Say, Mr. Black, there are a number of shares on the

list that never seem to be dealt in to any great extent. You seldom see them quoted in the market report."

"That's true," replied the broker. "We call them dead ones."

"Suppose you heard that a big operator was buying up all the shares of one of them he could get, what would you think about it?"

"I'd think it rather funny."

"Is that all you'd think?"

"I might think there was a deal on foot to bamboozle the public."

"If you thought that you'd buy some of that stock while it was low, hold it till the syndicate forced it up, and then do a little realizing yourself on the lambs, wouldn't you?"

The broker laughed.

"Have you discovered that some syndicate is going to do that?" smiled the trader, playfully.

"Maybe I have. Do you want to stand in with me?"

"What's your tip? If I think it's a good one I'll make it all right with you."

"Will you agree to give me ten per cent.?"

"Yes, if I tackle the proposition."

"All right, Mr. Black. Your word is good with me."

He then told the broker what his tip was, and how he got hold of it.

"It looks pretty good. I'll investigate, and if I take hold and win, you shall have ten per cent. of whatever I make," said the broker.

"Thanks. Good-by!"

Bob waited a few days, and noticing that X. & Z. had crawled up to 41, he took his money and went to the little bank, where he put it up on 1,000 shares of the stock at the market price.

Next day he met Will Sparks and told him he had bought 1,000 shares of X. & Z.

"X. & Z.!" exclaimed Will, in astonishment. "Jollying me, aren't you?"

"If you will take my advice you'll buy ten shares of it," said Bob, who then let a little light in on the subject by telling his friend all about the tip.

Will's mind changed around at once.

He concluded that X. & Z. was not so bad, after all.

In the end, he bought ten shares, and, like Bob, awaited results.

X. & Z. went to 45 before anybody noticed it, then brokers began asking themselves who was buying this fossil.

At the end of two weeks a broker appeared on the floor one afternoon and bid it up to 50, causing quite a buzz of excitement.

Next morning it was forced to 55, and during the day to 60, and the traders knew that there must be a raft of money behind it.

They began buying, eagerly, and so did the public.

The stock went up day after day till it reached 71 and a fraction, then Bob sold out and cleared \$30,000.

Will made \$300 and was as happy as a clam.

Two days afterward Bob received a letter in the mail from Broker Black.

It contained a check for \$6,000.

"Your tip was all right," the letter said, "and I used

it after the stock got about 45. I cleaned up \$60,000, and I hand you herewith the promised ten per cent."

"That makes me worth \$40,000," said Bob. "I only need \$4,000 more to make my dream come out true. Will I get it? I guess yes."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

Only \$4,000 more and he would reach the \$50,000 mark. Two days before Thanksgiving he finally broke in by buying 1,000 shares of S. & T., at 92.

On Thanksgiving morning he called at the Gaston residence to take an automobile ride up in Westchester with Edna, according to previous arrangement.

They were to get back in time for dinner at five.

When the machine appeared at the door the regular chauffeur was not in the machine.

There was a stranger, who handed in a note to Mrs. Gaston.

It purported to come from the regular man and said that having been taken ill he was obliged to send a substitute who, he said, was fully competent.

There seemed to be no objection to accepting the man who brought the note, so Bob and Edna got in the auto.

Bob gave the route to the driver of the machine and he started off.

He turned into Fifth avenue and went straight up that thoroughfare as far as 110th street, down which he turned as far as Seventh avenue, and then made a fine run to Central Bridge.

After crossing the bridge he took his course up Jerome avenue and put on a bit more speed.

All this time another auto, in which was a chauffeur and two full-bearded men, followed the Gaston machine.

Occasionally the driver let off a succession of toots, even when there was no occasion for it, and sometimes the chauffeur of the Gaston machine tooted when the coast was clear.

Bob and Edna were so engrossed in each other's society that they did not take any notice of these toots, which were in reality an exchange of prearranged signals.

It was a long run up Jerome avenue, and as the Gaston auto neared the end of it the chauffeur suddenly eased up.

The auto behind came whizzing past, ran on for several hundred yards and then stopped in front of a double gate.

The chauffeur got down, opened it and drove the auto into the place, leaving the gate open.

The Gaston man turned in there when he came to the gate.

Bob noticed his action at once.

"Hold on there! Where are you going?" he cried.

"I want to speak to the chauffeur of that machine. He's a friend of mine," replied the man.

Bob made no further objection, and the machine rolled up behind the other and stopped.

The two bearded passengers and the chauffeur of the other car came up.

The first two raised their hats to Edna.

"I presume you have called to visit this old historical house," said one of them, in tones that sounded familiar to Bob.

"No, sir; we were not aware that this was a historical house," replied Bob. "Our chauffeur came in here to speak to your chauffeur."

"Oh, I see!" smiled the man, wickedly. "Well, while they are talking it will give us great pleasure to show you over the house. You will see a very interesting relic. It is a private one and not often are strangers admitted, but as you are here we will let you see it. The furniture in several of the rooms is very old-fashioned, and there are many articles not seen to-day out of a curio shop. It will only take you a short time to go through the house, but, of course, if you don't care to do so we will not press the matter."

"Let's go in," said Edna, who liked to view old-fashioned things.

"Just as you say, Miss Gaston," replied Bob.

So they got out and accompanied the gentlemen into a wide, dreary-looking hall, built on a plan that was in style in the early part of the nineteenth century.

The two chauffeurs followed behind.

No sooner was the big hall door closed than the gentleman who had done the talking pulled off his beard and revealed himself to the surprised eyes of the two young people as Philip Gaston.

The other also pulled off his beard and disclosed the wicked countenance of Edward Gwin.

"We regret the necessity of detaining a young lady for whom I have such a high regard," said Gaston, "but we need money, and we think your mother will be willing to pay us \$25,000 for your release. At any rate, that is our price, and we think it quite moderate. All you have to do, Miss Edna, is to step into that room and write a letter to your mother, such as I shall dictate, and we will attend to the collection of the ransom. Until we receive the money you will have to remain here as our guest. As for your companion, as we can make nothing out of him, he will simply be held a prisoner until we let you go, though we owe him a debt which we would like to repay. Under the circumstances we have decided to let him off."

"This young lady is in my care, and I intend to protect her to the best of my ability," replied Bob, resolutely.

"That won't be much for we are four while you are only one, and a boy at that!" sneered Gwin.

"I may be a boy, but fortunately on this occasion I brought six friends along to protect Miss Gaston," said Bob, coolly.

"Six friends!" cried Gwin. "What do you mean? Where are your friends?"

"Here!" said Bob, suddenly pulling out a revolver. "Now, gentlemen, there is going to be trouble unless you open that door and let us depart. I shall be sorry to have to shoot, but shoot I will unless you throw up your project!"

The rascals were taken by surprise, and they were at a disadvantage because they did not happen to be armed.

"You wouldn't dare shoot one of us," said Gaston.

"No? I dare shoot all four of you to save Miss Gaston.

Now order that door opened or I'll begin on you!" and Bob covered him in a way that showed he meant business.

Gaston hesitated and then made a sign to one of the chauffeurs.

The man reluctantly opened the door.

"Step out, Miss Gaston; run down to the road and hail the first team or auto that passes. Bring the men up here."

"Don't do that," said Gaston. "We'll throw up the game."

"Very well," said Bob. "Now, my man," to their chauffeur, "step outside, turn the machine around, and be prepared to take us back to the city. If you obey my orders we'll let you off of the consequences your conduct entitles you to. As for the rest of you, the quicker you make yourselves scarce the better it will be for you."

Their own chauffeur followed Edna outside and did as he was told, helping the girl into the machine.

Bob ordered the others to stand away from the door.

When they did so he backed out and then made a dive for the auto, in which he jumped.

"Now go!" he said to the chauffeur, and the man started up.

"You're a brave boy—the bravest in the world!" said Edna, admiringly.

"I simply did my duty, Miss Gaston, and that was to protect you," he replied.

When they reached the city they drove through Central Park and reached the house long before they were expected.

Mrs. Gaston was surprised, but their story explained everything, and the lady thanked Bob for his service to her daughter, with tears in her eyes.

S. & T. stock went up eight points and then suddenly slumped.

Bob happened to be at the Exchange at the time and he rushed up to the bank and ordered his shares sold.

Strange to relate, he made just \$4,000, which gave him the coveted \$50,000.

He came to the conclusion that he had better stop lest his luck change and he lose all he had made.

So he quit short off and invested his money in five per cent. gold bonds.

That gave him an annual income of \$2,500.

Six months later he was engaged to Edna, with her mother's consent, and with every prospect of becoming a wealthy and successful man, we will draw the curtain on the boy who was lucky in stocks and made \$50,000 from a nickel.

THE END.

Read "BORN LUCKY; OR, FROM MINER TO MILLIONAIRE," which will be the next number (267) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

There is a unique claim to be advanced by a member of the Danish royal family, and that is the heaviest living specimen of any royal family in Christendom. This weighty scion of the Danish ruling house is Prince Gustav of Denmark, who, although only 23 years of age, tips the beam at 352 pounds. No living royalty can compare in weight with the youthful prince, the seventh son of the Crown Prince of Denmark. This young man was born at Copenhagen in 1887, and, like most stout people, he is easy going and good natured. As he is yet so young it is by no means impossible that he may add materially to his avoirdupois, so that he is not likely to have his special claims to distinction challenged.

Among the "big animals" represented in the Charleston Museum there are few more impressive in size or more fantastic in form than the huge manta or devil fish, which is at present sprawling, half hidden from the eyes of the visitors, on the top of the bison case in Agassiz Hall. This specimen has had an interesting history. A schooner was unloading her cargo near the breakwater on Sullivan's Island. To facilitate the work a hawser was stretched from the vessel to the shore, the slack of the rope dangling a little way beneath the surface of the water. Now the devil fish appears to be an animal of an investigating turn of mind, and he is known to take an especial interest in such unusual things as ropes or cables swinging loose in the water or attached to anchors on the bottom. So it was not surprising that a large devil fish which happened along at about seven o'clock one evening should have been attracted by the schooner's hawser and should immediately have set about satisfying his curiosity. His investigations resulted only in his becoming hopelessly entangled in the hawser, and after dragging the schooner, anchor and all, a distance of about half a mile, he was finally, at about midnight, brought alongside and killed with harpoons and lances.

Vice-Consul General Henry D. Baker, at Sydney, writing of the rabbit industry of Australia, says: "In many Australian towns rabbit killing and preparing the skins for export are growing assets of great value, especially during the winter season, when it enables men who would then have no other occupation to make a good living and spend considerable money at the country stores. Good wages are earned by experienced trappers, some of them making \$5 to \$7 a day. Last spring was favorable for the growth of feed in Australia, so that there has been an abundance of summer grass for the

rabbits to feed on; moreover, the export demand, especially for the skins, appears to be steadily developing. American hat manufacturers seem to be making much larger use of these skins. During the year 1909 the declared exports of marsupial skins, mostly rabbit skins, from the port of Sydney to the United States amounted to \$895,092, which was nearly double the value of 1908. The total amount of rabbit and other marsupial skins invoiced from this consulate general for the United States for the first three months of 1910 was \$168,597. While the trappers prove themselves useful to local agriculturists in keeping down the number of rabbits, they never thoroughly exterminate them from any particular district, for as soon as rabbits in any special locality get scarce the trappers will go elsewhere to trap them. Notwithstanding the profits of rabbit trapping, there is still enormous use of poisons and machines for fumigating warrens and of wire netting for restricting the pest."

JOKES AND JESTS.

"Yes," said Mrs. Wordsworth, "the family are most interesting. John dances divinely, Tom sings like an angel, David is a famous footballer, Susanne paints with great taste."

Hannigan—Sure, these scales is no good at all fur me. They only weigh up to two hundred pounds, an' Oi'm near to two hundred and fifty. Flannigan—Well, man alive, can't ye git on thim twice?

"Harry, Harry! What are you doing with your fingers in baby's mouth?" demanded mamma. "Looking for the spoon," he replied. "Nurse said he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but I can't find it."

"Willie," said his mother, "I wish you would run across the street and see how old Mrs. Brown is this morning." A few minutes later Willie returned and reported: "Mrs. Brown says it's none of your business how old she is."

"Whah's yoh father?" asked Aunt Cordelia. "Gone huntin'," answered Pickaninny Jim. "He said you might as well git de fire stahted an' peel de 'taters foh a fine stew to-morrow." "Hum! Which did he take wif 'im, de gun or de dahk lantern?"

"Yes," he said, "I get my looks from my mother and my brains from my father." "I'm sorry you told me this," she said. "Why?" "Because it gives me the impression that your parents were painfully lacking in generosity to their only child."

Old Lawyer—Yes, sir, I'm in favor of women jurors. If we had women to fix up the verdicts there would be no more disagreements. Young Attorney—How do you figure that out? Old Lawyer—All that would be necessary to get a verdict would be to send a newspaper to the jury room containing a bargain advertisement good for that day only.

When the minister, who was a bachelor, had been helped to Mrs. Porter's biscuits for the third time, he looked across the table at Rhoda, staring at him with round, wondering eyes. "I don't often have such a good supper as this, my dear," he said, in his most propitiatory tone, and Rhoda's face dimpled. "We don't always," she said, in her clear little voice. "I'm awful glad you came."

IN A WHIRLPOOL

By Kit Clyde.

Under the ice of a small island on the northwest coast of Norway a young fisher-lad lay sleeping in the boat in which he had been out all night, unconscious of the grim face and cruel eye that watched him from the thicket above with a look that boded him no good. Just then two men came pulling round the point behind which his boat was moored, and one of them said to the other, loud enough to be heard by the hidden watcher overhead, though not to wake the sleeper:

"There's a rich Englishman come into Langeness in his yacht, and he's offered a big reward to any man that'll find out what those letters are that are carved on the sea-king's grave."

"Why don't he offer a reward for the moon?" laughed the other. "Does he think any money can tempt men to go right into a whirlpool that would swallow the stoutest boat in these seas like a biscuit?"

"But they say that at flood-tide you may go through it without harm, if you start just at the right moment."

"Ay, if you do. But who would be fool enough to risk it?"

Then they passed on, and their voices were lost in the distance.

The moment their boat was out of sight behind the rocks, a wild face peered through the matted boughs overhead, and a bulky figure rose stealthily from the bushes and crept downward toward the sleeping boy with a long knife in its hand. One quick slash cut the mooring-rope, and the boat slowly drifted seaward with its slumbering occupant.

"The current sets straight for the whirlpool," muttered the ruffian, with a cruel laugh, "and when he's missed, they'll think the reward tempted him. I'm quits at last with his father for the thrashing that he gave me."

Only a few miles from the spot a small rocky islet had sunk down into the sea ages ago, creating by its fall one of the most dangerous whirlpools in northern waters, known in Norway as the "Well of Tuftiloe."

In the midst of the whirlpool stood up one dark, pillar-shaped crag, the sole remnant of the little islet, which the Norsemen, believing it to be some ancient hero's tomb, called "The Sea King's Grave." And, in fact, passing yachtsmen had seen upon it from a distance, through their telescopes, traces of rude carving and something that looked like the half-effaced letters of an old Runic inscription. But although the whirlpool, like its big brother, the maelstrom, was passable at certain states of the tide, no one had ever dared to try.

The quickening motion of the current, as it bore the light boat swiftly along, roused the boy at last, but it was too late. Being half asleep, it was some minutes ere he realized what had befallen him or whither he was going, and the first warning he had of this rush straight upon certain destruction was the dull roar of the distant whirlpool, which, the tide now being full ebb, was just at the height of its fury.

Fully roused at last, Mads Nilsson seized his oars and pulled until they seemed on the point of snapping, but all in vain.

Faster and faster the boat was whirled along—nearer and nearer it drew to the terrible ring of white foam that marked the deadly whirl. And now he could see plainly the grim crag that kept watch over that ghastly abyss, and now he almost touched its outermost eddy—and now he was dragged into it and began to spin dizzily round in lessening circles nearer and nearer to his doom.

And all this while the dancing ripples sparkled gayly around him, the sun shone gloriously in a cloudless sky, the white-winged sea birds soared rejoicingly overhead and seemed to mock him with their shrill cries.

It was hard to die amid all this brightness and beauty; but die he must, for there was no way of escape. Even in this dire strait, however, with the hungry waves leaping around him, the brave boy did not lose his presence of mind. One faint chance was still left to him, and he seized it.

As the boat made its final whirl around the central crag before plunging down into the depths below, he sprang upon the gunwale, and, exerting all his wonderful agility, made a desperate leap that landed him on the lowest ledge of the rock, bruised, bleeding, dizzy, but saved for the moment. In another instant the deserted boat had vanished forever into the roaring gulf below.

To all appearance the bold lad had escaped one death only to perish by another more lingering and painful; but even now he did not despair.

He remembered to have heard that just at flood-tide the whirlpool was not dangerous, and he determined to watch for the subsiding of its fury and take his chance of being able to swim ashore or to fall in with a boat.

But what should he do to fill up the long hours that lay between? He felt that the dizzy dance of the whirling waters around him and their ceaseless roar were already beginning to unstring his nerves and make his brain reel, and he knew that if he could not find some way to counteract their paralyzing influence he must soon become helpless and fall headlong into the abyss.

Just then his eye caught the unique letters cut in the rock above him, which no living soul but himself had ever seen so near, and the sight of them gave him an idea.

He knew nothing of the offered reward, but he did know that there were people who thought such things valuable and paid well for copies of them. If he escaped it might be worth something, and meanwhile it would divert his attention and keep him from losing his nerve.

So, turning his back resolutely to the mad riot of circling waves, he set himself to trace the letters with the point of his knife upon a small metal match-box which he had in his pocket.

It was a long task, but he completed it at last; and then he clambered to the top of the rock, hoping that the sight of his figure standing out against the sky might attract the notice of some passing fisherman.

For a long time he watched and waited in vain, and he was just beginning to think that he would have to try and save himself by swimming after all—for the hour of flood-tide was now drawing near and the violence of the whirlpool was beginning to abate—when, far in the distance, he suddenly described a tiny white sail.

No shout could be heard at such a distance; but the ready boy unwound the red sash from his waist and waved it over his head till his arm ached; and after a pause of terrible anxiety, he at length saw the boat alter her course and stand right for him.

The skill with which the two men handled her, kept clear of the fatal current by which Mads had been swept away, showed that both were practical seamen, and, as the boat neared him, the boy's keen eye recognized one of them as his own father.

When the rescuers came near enough for a shout to be heard, the father called out to his son to climb down the crag again and stand ready to make a plunge when he gave the word, as the boat could not come too near for fear of being dashed against the rock.

Just around the foot of the rock itself there was always a

strong eddy, which might suck down Mads even now, if he could not succeed in leaping clear of it.

For ten minutes or more the two sailors kept "standing off and on" till the fury of the whirlpool should be completely spent, while the daring boy, perched on the lowest ledge of the rock, waited and watched for the signal.

At length his father's powerful voice came rolling to him over the water:

"Now!"

Mingling with the shout came the splash of Mads' plunge into the water. Exerting all his strength, the active boy leaped far beyond the treacherous eddy that would have sucked him down among the sunken rocks, and in another moment he was safe in the boat, which turned and shot away from the perilous spot as lightly as the sea birds overhead.

A few days later the young hero received the reward that he had so strangely won; and thus the would-be murderer, instead of destroying his victim, actually helped him to earn more money than he had ever made in his life. Nor did the villain go wholly unpunished, for the end of the cut rope having been found and suspicion directed toward him, he had to sneak away by night and never dared to show his face on that coast again.

POPCORN FOR THE WORLD

"The popcorn centre of the world" is the title claimed by the little town of Odebolt, Iowa. There are 1,600 Odeboltians, and every one of them is convinced of the wisdom of keeping track of the world's popcorn appetite.

That 15,000,000 pounds of popcorn are raised within fifteen miles of the town is the result of a small beginning made years ago by A. H. W. Reuber, when he rented twenty-five acres of land and set it out in popcorn. He repeated this two or three times before he was convinced of the possibilities before him.

Then he got more land, and still more; and all of it he put into popcorn. His neighbors followed suit, and when that happened he bought their crops until he became the popcorn king. He raises 120 acres of his pet product and buys most of what his neighbors raise.

In Odebolt there are enough popcorn cribs to take care of 7,000,000 pounds of the grain. One of these cribs alone holds about 1,000,000 pounds. In 1909 there were more than 150 earloads of popcorn shipped from the town. This enormous yearly crop of popcorn can scarcely be estimated under certain conditions.

One man with forty acres planted to popcorn received \$3,780 for his crop last year. Out of this sum he had to deduct about \$5 an acre for the picking and the harvesting. This, together with his other expenses, including incidentals and the rent of the place, totalled \$13.50 an acre. His net profit on the entire crop was about \$3,240, which meant a net profit of exactly \$81 for each of the forty acres planted to popcorn.

This, however, is much above the average return for an acre of popcorn. Under ordinary circumstances, and in a fair season for both crop and price, the return per acre from popcorn, if the crop has been well cared for, should be about \$50. Different localities, different soils and different climatic conditions produce different results.

At the present time the pickers in the field are paid about 15 cents a hundred pounds, and under these conditions a skilful picker can make about \$3 or \$3.50 a day. This work includes board besides the wages. Popcorn must be picked with great care and no husks or silk left on the ears.

One of the strictest rules in the culture of popcorn is the

handling of the grain after it has been harvested. No time is allowed to elapse after the grain has been picked until it is safe in the roofed cribs either in the town or out on the farms. These cribs are specially constructed, for upon the thorough drying of the grain rests its grading and its popping power.

The cribs are made of strips of wood much narrower than those in the sides of an ordinary field corn-crib, in order that the air apertures may occur with greater frequency. A complete air circulation is established in many cribs by laying a line of loose drain pipes through the popcorn.

Each kernel of grain must dry throughout. Popcorn that is damp on one side or in the centre will not pop freely and perfectly. Uncommonly free ventilation is the chief requirement.

In some cases the farmer holds his grain in his own cribs on the farm instead of selling at the time of harvest. This is done in hope that the price will be stronger in the winter. Nearly every crib in Odebolt, both in and around the town, is fitted with drying flues at intervals of about six feet, and various other means are taken to insure a complete drying of the crop.

There are three buyers in Odebolt, and every bit of the popcorn business is done on a strictly cash basis with either Chicago or New York houses. The general market price for the cured article is one and a half cents a pound, and an acre usually takes from five to six pounds at such seeding.

Despite the alluring prospects offered now by the popcorn users, there is a still greater demand being created by the European trade. Only a short time ago popcorn was introduced for the first time in London, and now the English demand is growing steadily and with considerable rapidity.

The package industry and the candy concoctions are calling heavily upon the supply, which must be increased before long in order to meet the demand. New confections involving the use of popcorn are constantly appearing and are drawing upon the already limited supply of this country. Popcorn stands are springing up on the village corners as well as in the cities, and every year sees their number multiplied. The world's appetite for this delicate and delicious froth of the cornfields is plainly seen to be increasing.

There are pirates in Hongkong. Not the usual kind that greets the gentle stranger with expansive smile and takes what he has for worthless rubbish; nor yet the petty thieves that go by that name on our water fronts, but the real old-fashioned, murderous kind, who count not the victims as they reckon the spoils. Of course they do not swagger in costume, as all real pirates should, or ply their trade in Hongkong's immediate waters, but among the thousands of fishermen, stevedores and coal handlers that crowd the harbor's edge they mingle and gossip waterfront news, knowing well when a particularly rich cargo is due from the interior. And if in the purple twilight a junk darts out of one of the many estuaries far up the West or Pearl river and swoops with the suddenness of a hawk on the heavily laden prize, the struggle is short. Over the hills on the naked backs of a swarming crew the loot disappears forever from a smoking hulk in the rice swamps. Or, as happened in the case of the Sainam, half a hundred take passage in the crowded hold of a river steamboat, and when the handful of unsuspecting whites gather at dinner rises a heathenish yell on the startled air—and the ship is taken. Rifles thrust through bolted doors subdue the pitiful fire that lasts a little while from behind the shot-torn table cloth, but the ship is already headed for the bank by the quartermaster with a rifle barrel at his ear, and one more tragedy is added to the long list of crimes on the Sikiang.

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